

Subject: Opposition to House Bill 1540 (Educational Savings Accounts)

Testimony of Alexis Rasset, Mandan Public Schools (Parent & Special Education Teacher)

Honorable Committee Members, thank you for your commitment to North Dakota's students and families. I am both parent of a junior at Mandan High School and Special Education Teacher within the Mandan School District. While I value parental choice in education, I strongly oppose House Bill 1540 as currently drafted.

My primary concern centers on accountability. Public schools are rigorously audited and transparent in their financial management. This bill, however, lacks sufficient public oversight for private institutions receiving public funds through Educational Savings Accounts (ESAs). Taxpayers deserve assurance that their money is being used effectively and responsibly. Diverting funds without robust public accountability undermines this principle.

Furthermore, the argument that private schools achieve superior test scores overlooks a crucial factor: selective enrollment. Private schools can choose their student body, potentially excluding students with academic or behavioral challenges. Public schools, conversely, are committed to educating *all* children, regardless of their needs or backgrounds. This creates an unfair comparison.

Rural schools, vital to their communities, will be disproportionately harmed by this bill. ESAs will drain resources from these already financially strained institutions, offering little to no practical choice for rural students due to accessibility issues.

Instead of diverting funds, we should invest in strengthening our public schools. Equitable access to high-quality education for all North Dakota students, regardless of location or economic status, should be our priority. I support parental choice in supplemental services like tutoring and counseling, but not at the expense of our public education system, especially when private institutions lack appropriate oversight.

In conclusion, House Bill 1540 jeopardizes the foundation of public education in North Dakota. It lacks the necessary financial accountability and will exacerbate existing inequalities. I urge you to reject this bill and prioritize the strength and accessibility of our public schools.

Thank you for your consideration.