

1 HB1464 – Relating to the Establishment of an Educational
2 Reimbursement Program

3 Mandan Public Schools – Mike Bitz, Superintendent

4 Good afternoon Chairman Heinert and members of the House
5 Education Committee. For the record, my name is Mike Bitz. I
6 am fortunate to serve as the superintendent for Mandan Public
7 Schools. I am here today to oppose HB1532. I will be brief.

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9 ND has great private schools and our residents are fortunate to be
10 able to choose to attend these schools. One of the things that
11 makes our private schools great is they have the ability to say NO
12 to students, NO to parents, and NO to the state. If private schools
13 take public money, they should lose the ability to say NO to
14 students, parents, and the state.

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16 Last week in this very committee during testimony on a bill
17 calling for a study of the ND High School Activities Association,
18 Todd Porter, my friend and my District 34 Representative, stated

1 that once an entity takes public dollars, they are subject to open
2 record laws, and open meeting laws. This means all emails are
3 open to the public. It means finances are subject to open records
4 requests and that an audit needs to be submitted to the state. It
5 means board meetings are open to the public.

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7 In 1999, I replaced Jerry Bartholmay as superintendent of schools
8 in Hillsboro. Jerry left to be the superintendent of a large private
9 school system in North Dakota. He once told me that the best
10 thing about working in private education was that he was able to
11 call a student into his office, a couple of times per year, and tell
12 them they were not private school material; they belonged in the
13 public school. Every year, in Mandan, we take calls from parents
14 telling us they are no longer welcome in the private school they
15 have been attending. Because Mandan takes public money, we
16 are required to enroll these students.

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18 People often confuse school choice with parent choice. There is
19 a huge difference. Does the parent get to make the final choice or

1 does the school? In Mandan, because we take public dollars, we
2 enroll all students who wish to enroll. It is the PARENT’S
3 CHOICE. Currently if a student wants to enroll in private school,
4 the parent does not get the final say. It is the SCHOOL’S
5 CHOICE

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7 This bill is not written to benefit all kids, our emotionally
8 disturbed students, our students with intellectual disabilities, and
9 other high need special education students will not be able to take
10 advantage of this legislation because private schools will not
11 choose to educate them. Our rural students will not be able to
12 access this voucher because they don’t have a drive-able private
13 school option. Look at the list of people testifying for this
14 legislation. How many are from rural ND? This legislation is
15 “cherry-picking” the families who will benefit from this
16 \$24,000,000 appropriation.

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18 Mandan competes with St. Mary’s in many extra-curricular
19 activities. Last night at the St. Mary’s gym, both boys’ and girls’

1 basketball games were played. Two great games one won by St.
2 Mary's and the other by Mandan. The rules were the same for
3 both teams. Mandan is willing to compete with St. Mary's when
4 it comes to public dollars for education as well, but the rules need
5 to be the same. Because we take public money, we are required
6 to accept any and all students. Our emails and financial
7 statements are open to the public and we are required to submit
8 an audit. I can support public dollars for private schools if they
9 operate under the same rules.

10 I urge you to VOTE NO on HB 1532 and I am willing to stand
11 for any questions you may have.

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