

March 27, 2023

Chairman Sorvaag and members of Senate Appropriations Committee - Education and Environment Division,

My name is Collin Pigeon. I am an educator in North Dakota and live in District 9 in Rolla, ND. This is currently my 7th year as an educator and I teach Junior High English and High School Social Studies. I greatly enjoy working in our state in one of its close knit rural communities.

I write this letter to you today concerning HB 1532. HB 1532 would establish an educational reimbursement program for students who attend our private schools. I urge you to vote against this bill as constructed and give it a DO NOT Pass recommendation. It also benefits private schools at the expense of our public schools that serve the majority of students in our state. It is also a threat to religious liberty in our state and goes against “separation of church and state.”

This is a bad bill in my opinion for a wide variety of reasons. Homeschooling and private schools are important parts of the education system in the US and I have great respect for them. At the same time, public school is the anchor of the American education system. It has been since our founding as a nation and was an integral part of developing our American Democracy. Public school’s importance is especially true in ND as many children live in rural areas where private schools are not an option. Funding going to other schools is money taken from those rural public schools most ND children rely on. I understand the argument made that this is new money being allocated. Still though, the money is coming from taxpayers and could be put toward public education.

Private schools do not have to answer to the state for how they spend money like public schools do. They are not also held to the same standards in terms of accommodating students. As a class B school educator, I truly believe that the variety of students we educate makes our school community stronger. However, educating students on IEPs or students with other disabilities adds extra costs and time requirements for public schools. Private schools do not have to accept these students. If private schools are going to get this extra funding, they should be subject to the same requirements as public schools.

We live in a state and country where parents have choices about how to educate their children. HB1532 would now ask others to help pay for parents' choices to attend private schools by establishing a payment to those faith communities/schools with no strings attached. As a general principle, I do not think private schools should get taxpayer funding. I favor a broad interpretation of the establishment clause in keeping with the vision of "separation of church and state" outlined by our founding fathers.

I am concerned about this bill's effect on religious liberty. In *Carson v. Makin* (2022), <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2021/20-1088>, the Supreme Court ruled that funding given by a state to private schools needs to go to religious private schools equally. In our state, we have a number of private religious schools. This means this bill will send tax payer dollars to schools that promote a certain religion. To reiterate, this violates our country's long held separation of church and state ideals. North Dakotans' tax dollars would be potentially funding religious institutions that conflict with one's own religion. Tax money collected from Lutheran North Dakotans should not have to fund private Catholic schools and vice-versa. Christians' tax money should not have to go to a potential private Hindu or Islamic school should either one day be in our state. The

government should not entangle itself with religion in this way by funding private religious schools.

Again, I take no issue with accredited private schools no matter their nature, but I do with them getting funds that should go to public secular education. Private schools should not get funds from the government in this manner. Religious liberty needs to be protected across our state too. Giving funding to private religious schools harms religious freedom. Please vote NO on this bill.

Thank you,

Mr. Pigeon

Rolla, ND