



NDSBA
**NORTH DAKOTA SCHOOL
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HB 1532 | Testimony of Alexis Baxley
Senate Education Committee
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Chairman Elkin and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Alexis Baxley. I am the executive director of the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents all 170 North Dakota public school districts, their boards, and several multi-district special education units. NDSBA stands firmly in opposition to HB 1532.

While NDSBA supports the right of a parent to choose the best educational experience for their child, we believe the public dollars belong to public schools. There is good reason for this belief. The public school system is expected to adhere to a multitude of rules, standards, and requirements. Private, home, and parochial schools are not subject to these same requirements, the most significant of which is the inability to turn away any single student. Public schools are constitutionally obligated to provide a free and appropriate education to every student that walks through our doors. To direct funds towards any educational entity that is not obligated to do the same is inappropriate. Bill supporters will tell you they would be happy to take all students. I think we will hear testimony today that shows in reality, they are not prepared to truly take ALL students. The lack of accountability is further underscored by the bill's lack of definition for a qualified school beyond the willingness to accept program funds and basic approval by NDDPI. This was not an oversight, and supporters of the bill have adamantly opposed any measure of accountability resembling the requirements placed on public schools.

Bill supporters tell you that this bill is about providing choice to parents. However, it doesn't actually provide choice to parents who don't already have it. Families in rural North Dakota who do not have access to private schools will have no more access if this bill is to pass. In fact, it will be rural tax dollars subsidizing the tuition of students in Dickinson, Minot, Bismarck, and Fargo. Students with disabilities or behavioral issues who are turned away do not gain choice with the passage of this bill.

We have spent much time this session discussing parents' role in education. Public schools, through their locally-elected school boards, the legislature, and the Department of Public Instruction, are accountable to the taxpayers AND parents. Private and parochial schools, on the other hand, are often governed by boards of appointed directors and/or clergy rather than locally-elected boards. Appointed boards or directors do not require

the same level of accountability as elected boards, and there is no requirement to answer to parents or the taxpayer. The bill even goes so far as to prohibit any government entity from imposing regulations, including educational program, practices admissions, curriculum, etc. The bill wrongly asks North Dakota taxpayers to contribute to these schools, but expects nothing of them.

For these reasons, NDSBA stands in opposition to HB 1532 and encourages this committee to give it a do not pass recommendation. Thank you for your time, and I will stand for any questions.