

Good morning Chairman Elkin and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Rick Diegel, and I am the superintendent of both the Kidder County and Linton School Districts, and I am speaking in opposition to HB 1532. This is my 36th year in education and my 23rd year as a superintendent.

My purpose for opposing HB 1532 falls into two categories; lack of accountability and the effects of funding public education.

On the accountability side, I just don't understand how we can distribute \$24 million of tax payer money with no accountability. Light of Christ School System (St. Mary's) will get more public monies than one of my school districts (Linton), along with area schools HMB, Medina, Strasburg, Zeeland, Ashley and Wishek.

However, all of the schools I mentioned are held accountable by conducting financial audits that the public can request, having open meetings that the public can attend and having open records that the public can request. St. Mary's, and other private schools, will not be required to do any of these. If transparency isn't important for a private school that receives \$2.2 million of public funds, why is it important for the districts I listed that receive the same or less in public funds. If you tell the tax payers and farmers in all of these districts that we will no longer have financial audits, open records and open meetings, my guess is that you'll need to have this hearing in a lot bigger room.

I have been told that our private schools will be held accountable by their major donors that help oversee their schools, and that they should simply be trusted. Well, I also have big donors, they're called farmers and ranchers. Why can private school donors be trusted to keep watch over their school, but mine can't? That is a major slap in the face, and insinuates that they can be trusted, but public schools can't. Over my 23-year career, I have become used to accountability, and I believe that when we know we're being watched, we all act a little better. When is accountability ever bad, and why are private schools afraid of it?

Also, has anyone noticed how ironic it is that we are in a body that is funded by public monies, so in the name of transparency, this testimony is live streamed to the public, and my testimony, along with other submitted testimony is published on the legislative website? However we are

debating giving \$24 million of public funds to private schools that will provide no transparency to the public.

On the funding side, the argument is being made that this \$24 million isn't being diverted from public to private schools, but I don't agree with that argument. If this \$24 million were part of our funding formula, it would equate to approximately \$212 per pupil. Over the past 6 years, here are the amounts that the funding per pupil payment has increased: \$0, \$0, \$193, \$197, \$100 and \$101. This \$212 increase is more than any of the increases we've had over the last 6 years! If there is an extra \$24 million laying around that you don't know what to do with, why not add it to the funding formula? In my Kidder County School District, next year we are cutting our Family and Consumer Science program because of finances, and we will offer it through an online CTE course. I have plenty of students and parents not happy that we aren't offering this program, but we are trying to make our expenditures and revenues become more equal, and those decisions are part of my job. And in my Linton School, we are delaying replacing a roof because of finances. However, this \$212 per student pupil payment would equal approximately \$92,000 in Kidder County and \$67,000 in Linton, and would allow both of my schools to continue to provide programs, perform general maintenance and keep local property taxes as low as possible.

Thank you, and I will stand for any questions.