

**Testimony in favor of House Bill 1369**

**Mark Jorritsma, Executive Director  
Family Policy Alliance of North Dakota  
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Good morning Chairman Owens and honorable members of the House Education Committee. My name is Mark Jorritsma, Executive Director of Family Policy Alliance of North Dakota. I am testifying in favor of House Bill 1369, with suggested amendments, and respectfully request that you recommend a “DO PASS” on this bill.

Family Policy Alliance of North Dakota believes that parents have a God-given responsibility and right to direct the upbringing and education of their children. Toward this end, the Education Empowerment Program (EEP) described in this bill is more than just another school choice mechanism. The EEP allows parents to fully tailor their child’s entire educational experience. Family Policy Alliance of North Dakota believes this bill will help launch children to success, something we all want.

Families know best what type of educational experience their children need to succeed, and an EEP give families the keys to unlock that experience for their children. We want to see every child succeed, and helping them access the education they need to become their best lays a critical foundation. When a child is impeded because he or she isn’t able to get the education they need, we have work to do on our system of education.

Almost 30 empirical studies have showed again and again that increased school choice improves academic outcomes for participants and public schools, saves taxpayers money, moves students into more integrated classrooms, and strengthens their shared civic values (*A Win Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice* – Greg Forster, May 2016).

Let me close on a personal note. Our son was diagnosed in second grade with a condition that makes it difficult for him to focus on his studies. We tried all types of school environments for him, but finally placed him in a private school where he seemed to thrive. Unfortunately, the cost of this school was prohibitive. We then decided to homeschool him. It worked better than our wildest dreams. I am now very happy to report that he graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of Mary, was on the Dean’s list, and is now employed as a software engineer at a highly respected company. In retrospect, the choices we made were very difficult, but thankfully, appear to have been the right ones.

However, during this entire time of his school career, we were never able to find the help he needed. As a result, we spent an enormous amount to get him the educational assistance he needed to succeed. My wife gave up her successful career as a CPA, we had to sell a vehicle to make ends meet, take out a second mortgage on our home, and things like vacations and other common “niceties” were completely out of the question for many years. I do not believe I am overstating the case when I say it was a period of significant financial hardship for our family. That said, I’d do it again in a heartbeat.

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The thing that bothers me are the families that may not have sufficient income, a second car to sell, or may not be able to take out a second mortgage on their home. These are the people I am speaking for today. So I ask you, please give them the resources to let their children thrive. Please vote House Bill 1369 out of committee with a “DO PASS” recommendation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I will stand for any questions you may have.