

Good afternoon!

My name is Michelle Klinger. I was compelled to testify here today in regard to SF 1525 bill. I am the mother of a child who is on an IEP as well as a special education teacher who is proud to work for Bemidji Independent Public School District 31.

My son was identified as needing special education services through Bemidji Public School District during early childhood education. Without Bemidji Public Schools, my son would not be doing as well as he is in the 5th grade. All of his teachers have been our lifeline in many ways to his educational success. In order for our child to become a successful adult who contributes to society we needed him to learn how best to do that. We have looked at other places to send our son, private and charter schools, but we believe that he would not get the best care there. St. Phillips Private school is not ADA compliant and our son uses a wheelchair. Also, the educational goals are not always aligned to the high state standards that the state of MN has enacted.

Last year was my first school year in the classroom. As a new special education teacher during the time of COVID, I can tell you that my appreciation for public schools has only increased. Public schools are the center of the community. If you need proof of this consider the countless bus drivers that drove meals and wifi service to students' homes. Consider the teachers, such as myself, that created paper packets, online classrooms, telephone calls to families, and yes home visits to many families during the beginning of the C19 pandemic. Consider the President of the United States calling for schools to open. Several of my areas private schools are not fully opened, whereas ISD 31 reopened September 2020 and has remained open since.

During this unique time in our history, it is notable from my perspective that special education students are not receiving a fair shake. Yes, the Minnesota legislature increases funding to special education yearly. However, the cost for services increases even more. Therefore, you have really not increased funding at all, losing ground to increased needs. Special education is not a priority for private schools and are not subject to the Free and Appropriate Public Education standards that public schools are held to. Students who are considered to have a need in the area of special education would not be serviced in a private school to the same extent that a student is within a public school.

Our students and families are still recovering from the losses of the pandemic. Special education students will bear the full brunt of all of this. By submitting this bill now you are further disenfranchising students the successes that they could have as adults. Instead of providing our students more, you are asking them to waive their rights and accept less.

I urge you to oppose SF 1525.