

MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, January 31, 2023

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Lent, Vice Chairman Toews, Senators Den Hartog, Nichols, Carlson, Herndon, Lenney, Ward-Engelking, and Semmelroth

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Lent** called the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:00 p.m.

WELCOME: **Chairman Lent** welcomed the visitors that were in attendance.

RS 30093 **Freedom in Education Savings Accounts (FIESA).** **Senator Nichols** presented **RS 30093**. If enacted, this bill, known as the "Freedom in Education Savings Accounts" (FIESA), would create savings accounts for Idaho families with K-12 age children. The act would allow dollars to follow students so parents could access the education services and environments that worked best for their children. Eighty percent of the "most current available statewide average general maintenance and operations fund expenditures per full term average daily attendance as calculated by the department" or approximately \$5,950 would be available to eligible students, based on 2020-2021 State Department of Education financial summaries. A student who participated in the program must have been a resident of Idaho who was eligible to enroll in a public school for any grades K-12. Parents would be able to access and spend these funds on behalf of their child for approved educational expenses through an online platform. A "Parent Review Commission" was established to provide recommendations to the department about how to implement, administer and improve the program. The program would come into effect on and after July 1, 2023.

This legislation would introduce a universal educational savings account (ESA) for Idaho families, which would give them more control over their child's education. **Senator Nichols** pointed out how Idaho already had limited school choice, but stated that this system was not sufficient. She cited issues like declining test scores, overcrowding of classrooms, curriculum issues, teacher wages, and staff shortages as evidence for how the current education system had been frustrating Idaho families and educational staff. She mentioned how this potential legislation was modeled after Arizona's ESA system and that 26 States across the union had already introduced ESA bills in their statehouses.

MOTION: **Vice Chairman Toews** moved to send **RS 30093** to print. **Senator Herndon** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Lent** adjourned the meeting at 3:07 p.m.

Senator Lent
Chair

Linette Grantham
Secretary

Tyler Allen
Assistant Secretary