



Great Public Schools

Great Public Service

**Testimony HB 1413
House Education Committee
January 25, 2021**

Chairman Owens and members of the Committee, I am Nick Archuleta, president of ND United. I rise today in support of HB 1413.

Members of the Committee, I do not rise in support of HB 1413 with the confidence of a man who believes that this well-intentioned bill will receive a DO PASS recommendation from this Committee. Even if this Committee were predisposed to address the issue of student hunger in the manner that this bill calls for, the price tag would likely give members pause to recommend it favorably.

No, Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of HB 1413 because this bill shines a bright light on an issue of great importance: hungry kids. Educators from across state recognize that kids come to school hungry in unexpected numbers. They also know that that these children show up to learn hungry every day through no fault of their own. They also know the educational challenges encountered by hungry kids are very real and difficult to overcome.

For many parents, writing a check to pay for school meals is as natural as breathing in and out. However, for numerous parents, whose financial reality has been negatively impacted by COVID or other economic factors, that simple act has turned into an inflection point; do they pay for school meals or divert that money to pay the rent? Or to keep the lights on? Or to pay for prescription medicine? Or to pay the mortgage? Or to make the car payment?

What we have seen lately is that students have been "lunch shamed." When a student's account has run out of money, he or she is allowed a meal different than his or her classmates. Usually, it is a peanut butter sandwich and a carton of milk. Worse yet, these students often must go to a separate table to pick up their lunches, adding to the stigma they experience through no fault of their own. In some communities, we have heard reports in recent years that students with a negative balance in their meal accounts have been denied the opportunity to attend prom, participate in school sponsored events, or even walk across the stage to receive their diplomas. As these unnecessarily punitive actions have been exposed, school districts have changed their policies, and that is a very good thing. However, the underlying issue remains and that is, I believe, what the sponsors of the bill have endeavored to address.

Chairman Owens and members of the Committee, I hope you agree with me that it is good to see creative proposals for investing Legacy Fund earnings in North Dakota's children. I further hope that you will look favorably on addressing the issue of food security for North Dakota's public-school students. If you deem that this bill is not the preferable vehicle to address this issue, then I would encourage the legislature to seek the right response on behalf of our students.

This concludes my testimony, Chairman Owens. I am happy to stand for questions.