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**Testimony on HB 1413
Senate Education Committee
March 8, 2021**

Chairman Schaible and members of the Committee, for the record my name is Nick Archuleta, and I am the president of North Dakota United. I rise today in support of HB 1413 and to urge a DO PASS recommendation.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of HB 1413 because this bill, in its original form, shone 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.

As this information has become more widely known, communities have rallied to help eliminate lunch debt. ND United member Jason Boynton and others organized Lunch Aid in Fargo to help retire the lunch debt of students. While this help is welcome and important, it is just a band-aid on an open wound because the day a student’s lunch debt is retired, it starts all over again because the underlying causes have not been addressed.



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While there is ample anecdotal evidence of the issue of student hunger, Mr. Chairman and member of the Committee, there is still much to learn about the causes and pervasive effects of student hunger on the children we educate in North Dakota. That is why ND United supports HB 1413. I would respectfully urge this Committee to consider amending this bill. I believe this bill would be better if, on line 6, the words, "*consider studying*," were replaced with the word, "*study*."

With that, Chairman Schaible, I am happy to stand for any questions.