

1 Testimony for HB 1491 Deb Egeland, on behalf of Independent Beef Association of ND.

2 Good Afternoon Chairman Heinert and Education Committee members. Thank you for considering this
3 bill.

4 My name is Deb Egeland. I was a school food service director for 8 years and worked at DPI Child
5 Nutrition for 25 years, plus, I am a parent. I represent I-BAND, the Independent Beef Association of
6 North Dakota. We are a group of ranchers that would like to see relief for working parents struggling to
7 pay for school meals while also supporting local communities.

8 The federal government does provide funding for school meals for families that meet income guidelines
9 for free and reduced-price meals. The state is already covering the 30 cents families would normally pay
10 for reduced-price breakfasts. This bill would provide funding to cover the 40 cents reduced-price parents
11 currently pay for lunch and the normal paid price for families that do not qualify for free or reduced-
12 price meals.

13 Reduced-price families are often the working poor who hold down 2 or 3 jobs and might be just \$5 over
14 the income limit for free meals. Paid status families are also struggling. Inflation has cut into their
15 budgets even though they work hard at their jobs every day.

16 Many of our state legislators would like to see some sort of tax relief for working families. This bill would
17 provide much needed financial relief for our hard-working families. Funding the school meals would put
18 more money back in the pockets of working families in the same way that tax relief would. We know
19 the money would be spent on school meals that are vital to our students while they are growing and
20 learning. Everyone wants to give students a good breakfast on test day, what about all the other days
21 while they are absorbing the knowledge they need for test days? This is an investment in growing and
22 nourishing our future generation while also providing much needed financial relief to our working
23 families right now.

24 If the \$89.5 million for breakfast and lunch sounds high, maybe you would could compromise on just
25 paying the reduced-price breakfast and lunch charges. This would alleviate subsidizing meals for wealthy
26 families, which is a concern of some of our own I-BAND members. Another compromise might be to just
27 pay for breakfast for all students to fuel the school day. We know that almost all the students ate
28 breakfast when it was offered free in the classroom during COVID.

29 There are some that would say spending money on food that is eaten and gone is frivolous. Maybe, if
30 the food was for a party or celebration. This is for school meals to fuel the brains and bodies of students
31 while they are in school learning.

32 We would like to propose an amendment to promote local economies by requiring schools to utilize a
33 portion of this funding on North Dakota locally grown/raised food, possibly 25%. This would ensure that
34 these state funds help support local agriculture. USDA recently awarded supply chain assistance funds to
35 schools with the caveat that the funds be spent on minimally processed foods, preferably local foods.
36 Schools should not have too much of a burden proving they purchased local beef, potatoes, pasta,
37 honey or other crops. Then the schools can spend their USDA foods (commodity) dollars on fruits and
38 vegetables not grown in our state. We have a saying for local foods: Kids win, farmers win, communities
39 win! Thank you for listening. I would be happy to answer any questions.