

Testimony of Landis Larson, ND AFL-CIO President
In Support of HB 1491
January 30, 2023

Chairperson Heinert and members of House Education:

My name is Landis Larson, President of the North Dakota AFL-CIO. The North Dakota AFL-CIO is the federation of labor unions in North Dakota, representing the interests of all working people in our state.

I am testifying on behalf of the North Dakota AFL-CIO in support of House Bill 1491.

We are here today because we know what a huge relief it was for working families to not worry about school meals while federal funding was covering it. Providing a basic hot meal for every kid who needed one, at no charge to the student or families, worked for everyone. It became normal. The problems we had around school meals, including things like meal shaming, and school meal debt, faded into the rearview mirror of things any of us had to worry about.

We are now back to school-meals-as-usual, and once again, it's really challenging for everyone involved: students, parents, grandparents, cafeteria workers, teachers, school administrators, school boards, and community groups. For working families, the end of this popular program and this was an unexpected financial jolt. With increased food prices, this has been difficult to fit back into family budgets, especially those with multiple children in school.

Investing in school meals is one of the best investments in our legacy and our future. North Dakota has an incredible opportunity to be a leader on school meals policy. Not only do we support House Bill 1491, but we suggest that it be amended to also include breakfast for all public school students at no charge. There is plenty of evidence that breakfast is also a great investment in our students.

Making sure our kids have access to all the tools they need to be successful while they are at school, including proper nutrition, just makes sense. The North Dakota AFL-CIO fully supports House Bill 1491.