

Dear Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

My testimony is in favor of House Bill 1491. I ask that you give this bill a Do Pass.

As a child I grew up in North Dakota and Minnesota rural schools. While I don't know the circumstances or how they came about, I was made to help serve with lunch maids for my fellow students. It was only after I helped serve every other child, that I was able to be served and sit down to eat. I had much less time than my fellow students and had to eat very quickly before being pulled back into class.

I don't know if this kind of practice still occurs, but I hear stories from time to time about kids being shamed or penalized for not being able to afford lunch. And I'm sure some rural schools may get more creative than other places in how they handle poor students. I think this bill will garner quite a lot of favorable testimony and the question we have to ask ourselves as a state will be if the funding is warranted.

As someone who works in suicide prevention and as an advocate for youth, I'm not sure there is a better place to spend money than on keeping our youth fed. Within the work of suicide prevention food insecurity can be a driven component, but the health and developmental factors associated with a lack of nutrition or social shaming cannot be overstated.

There are two things I'd like to bring up as a suicide prevention advocate within this discussion: Accessibility and Opportunity. I know our state and the people in it do not have the funds to support the needs of all of our youth to the extent we wish we could. That we must make difficult decisions and compromises. Within suicide prevention work, we are often working within several limitations. We don't always have the support someone needs, but what we want to offer isn't everything, it is *something*.

When we consider this bill and as we think about and make amendments to it within a financial lens, please consider how we can at least stop some of the worst harm. That kids have some opportunity to be fed decent meals. Further that this opportunity is not so difficult to access, that it becomes impractical.

What I would personally love is if our youth simply did not have to think about this at all. That them getting food is a matter of course, rather than a complicated battle. That we don't need creative solutions like kids working with the lunch maids.

It is for these reasons I urge you to consider voting Do Pass. Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state.

Best regards,
Faye Seidler