

Testimony of Landis Larson, ND AFL-CIO President
In Support of HB 1491
March 15, 2023

Chairperson Elkin and members of Senate 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 strongly believe that it is our moral obligation as society to provide students all the tools they need to learn and grow while they are in our care at school, and that includes adequate nutrition. Not only is it the right thing to do, but funding for school meals is one of the best investments we could make in our students, our families and our future. We all know that hunger and anxiety about meals impacts students ability to concentrate, and well fed students are better learners and have fewer behavioral issues.

North Dakota's working families are facing steep increases in basic cost of living, specifically food and housing costs. Providing school meals would help our families and our school districts better balance their budgets in these difficult economic times. For those families that qualify for this bill as it stands, at 200% of poverty, this legislation would be a major relief.

North Dakota has an incredible opportunity to be a leader on school meals policy. Not only do we support House Bill 1491, but we prefer that it be changed back to the pre-amendment funding level of \$89.5 Million to provide school meals for ALL students at no cost, regardless of income. Even funding free school meals to the level of 400% of poverty would ensure that most families in North Dakota would qualify while those most able to pay continue to do so.

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.