

Support for HB 1475

Dear Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee:

The North Dakota Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (NDAND) fully supports HB 1475, a vital initiative that ensures all children in North Dakota have access to nutritious meals, which are essential for their health, development, and academic success. This bill provides a crucial safety net by guaranteeing that every student receives healthy meals, addressing food insecurity and fostering better long-term health outcomes.

Proper nutrition is fundamental to children's physical and cognitive development, as well as their academic performance. For many students, school meals are the most balanced and nutritious meals they will consume each day. Universal access to these meals will encourage greater participation, ensuring that all students, regardless of income, receive the nourishment they need. By removing income-based eligibility requirements, HB 1475 reduces stigma and promotes a sense of community within schools, where all students share the same meal experience.

Food insecurity is a recognized risk factor for obesity and other chronic diseases. Addressing food insecurity in children will not only improve their immediate health and academic outcomes but will also help mitigate the future burden of chronic diseases, ultimately benefiting public health and reducing healthcare costs.

Furthermore, HB 1475 will provide critical support for the state's school nutrition professionals, who play an essential role in delivering safe, nutritious, and appealing meals. Expanding the program will create job opportunities within school nutrition services, which will contribute to local economies while ensuring schools can meet the growing demand for meal services.

We thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

The North Dakota Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics