

Testimony for HB 1475
House Education Committee

Greg Gallagher

February 3, 2025

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Education Committee,

I am Greg Gallagher, a resident of Mandan, a member of the Mandan Health Coalition, and Vice-Chair of the Statewide Advocacy and Engagement Committee of the American Health Association in North Dakota. I provide this testimony as a private citizen and not as a lobbyist or representative for any other party. I testify in support of HB 1475 based on my understanding of this matter gained through my involvement with these and other organizations, and my over four-decades long career involving educational matters.

HB 1475 presents a long-overdue remedy to a persistent school readiness hurdle: how to provide nutritious meals to all students in our state’s elementary and secondary schools as a component of their education, thereby affording them the best opportunity to learn and grow academically and socially to their fullest potential.

School Readiness implies addressing how we can best position students to be able to learn by meeting their basic needs. Securing access to good food and integrating nutritious meals into the school day goes a long way to improving school readiness for all students. It will reap significant rewards in learning and improved behavior.

Although federal programs offer some level of funding for low-income families, the specified eligibility levels have long been identified as too low, burdened by paperwork, or perceived as a source of shame for families. Students have been known to go without food rather than place themselves in a position of shame. Some schools attempt to help some students with a simple cheese sandwich--if they are aware or can. Some individuals may criticize providing school meals, observing that parents should have “skin in the game” by

providing for their children's lunches. Yet, it is the child who ultimately suffers the hunger, shame, and disregard of a system that appears all too indifferent to their experienced reality.

HB 1475 leverages federal and other funding to help offset state expenses and reimbursements are made only on actual meals served. Some parents may continue to prepare lunches and snacks for their children. Yet for many parents, school meals provided under HB 1475 will be received gratefully as a means to reduce their financial burden or other stressors.

School meal programs are widely popular with voters and the public. It has been my experience that when individuals are asked about providing school meals to students, many people express surprise that students are not already provided food as a component of education in our schools. The public supports the intent of HB 1475.

I ask that you vote to provide school meals to the children of our state. Please vote "Yes" in support of HB 1475.

Thank you.