

February 7th, 2025
HB 1553

Rising grocery prices are placing significant strain on North Dakota families, and the *School Meals for All* initiative offers a viable solution. This policy could save parents an estimated \$850 per child annually— over \$11,000 throughout a child's school years. These savings would empower families to allocate resources toward essentials like housing, healthcare, clothing, and extracurricular activities, reducing financial stress and expanding opportunities for their households.

This initiative isn't just about dollars; it's about ensuring every child in North Dakota has the tools they need to be successful. Nutritious school meals do more than fill stomachs; they provide stability for families facing food insecurity and help students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that students are not able to learn when they do not have their physiological needs met.

While federal nutrition programs provide some support, a large portion of North Dakota's food-insecure children don't qualify for assistance. That leaves countless families struggling to bridge the gap. Investing in *School Meals for All* is not only an investment in our children but also in our state's economy. When families have more disposable income, they can contribute more to their communities, strengthening local businesses and fostering economic growth.

I urge our legislature to prioritize the well-being of families and children by passing the *School Meals for All* initiative. The opportunity to give every child in North Dakota the foundation they need to succeed is in our hands.

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