



1 **Testimony in Support of House Bill 1553**

2 Chairman Heinert members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am  
3 here in support of **House Bill 1553**, which seeks to provide school meals at no cost to all  
4 students in North Dakota’s public and nonpublic schools.

5 Ensuring that all students have access to nutritious meals is **not just a matter of policy—it is a**  
6 **matter of equity, student well-being, and academic success.** Research consistently shows that  
7 students who are well-nourished are better able to concentrate, engage in learning, and succeed  
8 academically. This bill removes barriers that many families face, ensuring that no child is left  
9 behind due to financial constraints. **THIS BILL MATTERS**

- 10 **1. Eliminates Stigma & Supports Dignity**
- 11 ○ By providing meals at no cost to all students, this bill prevents the **stigmatization**
  - 12 **of children** who receive free or reduced-price meals.
  - 13 ○ No student should have to experience embarrassment or be singled out due to
  - 14 their family's financial situation.
- 15 **2. Reduces Administrative Burden**
- 16 ○ The current system requires schools to process applications, track payments, and
  - 17 manage unpaid meal balances.
  - 18 ○ A universal school meal program simplifies operations and allows schools to
  - 19 focus on **education rather than meal debt collection.**
- 20 **3. Improves Learning & Classroom Behavior**
- 21 ○ **Hunger is a learning barrier.** Children who are not hungry **perform better**
  - 22 **academically**, show improved behavior, and have fewer disciplinary issues.
- 23 **4. Respects Local Control While Providing State Support**
- 24 ○ School districts will continue managing their meal programs, while the state
  - 25 **allocates necessary funding to ensure meals remain free for all students.**
  - 26 ○ This allows local schools to focus on quality meal service rather than financial
  - 27 constraints.
- 28 **5. Utilizes Legacy Fund Earnings for Long-Term Investment in Education**
- 29 ○ HB 1553 responsibly directs **\$140 million** from the **Legacy Earnings Fund** to
  - 30 cover school meal costs, ensuring a **sustainable funding source** without
  - 31 burdening local taxpayers.
  - 32 ○ This is an investment in **North Dakota’s children, workforce, and future**

33 Every child deserves to **learn with dignity, free from hunger or stigma.** HB 1553 is a  
34 **practical, responsible, and compassionate** step toward making North Dakota’s schools places  
35 where every student has the nutrition they need to thrive.

36 I urge you to support this bill, and I thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any  
37 questions.