

Testimony in Support of HB 1553

Carter Hass
February 13, 2025

Mr. Chairman, Mrs. Vice Chairman, and honorable members of The House Education Committee. I stand before you today, urging you to give a DO PASS recommendation for this bill.

Growing up, my family almost always qualified for reduced meals. While I can testify today that my family **is** in a ideal position regarding income and employment. I can also say that we have had our fair share of moderately challenging situations. I am blessed to have everything I do, but I've been in a position where government services are a part of those blessings. So I ask you to consider the services this bill would provide a "blessing."

First, I'd like to look at the rights of students. The United Nations regards the right to food for schoolchildren as "intrinsic to the human right to have access to sufficient safe and nutritious food." In other words, the right to eat is a human right due to the governmental obligations to ensure the health of all students. When we talk about the rights of people and the law, we have to talk about the government's and parents' responsibility. Every parent is responsible for keeping their children safe, well-fed, and loved. They don't get to choose. It is an occupational responsibility that they signed up for when deciding to have a child. Likewise, the government is responsible for protecting its citizens, especially the most vulnerable. In publicly funded schools, it is the responsibility of keeping the children healthy; therefore, feeding them is a part of that responsibility. The right to food is a human right and an obligation of any modern government.

But let's talk more about the parental side of things. Let me remind the honorable members of The House Education Committee that you represent the 9.8% of North Dakotans living in poverty according to the US census. And most importantly, you represent the people. You must put the best interests of your citizens first. And they could surely use your help. Let us not forget that a government by the people must be logically made up of the people. Meaning that every senator and every representative is, by definition, "the people." You must put yourselves in the shoes of those in low-income families who qualify for reduced or even free meals. You represent them. So don't forget them.

As a student, I have witnessed children sitting alone at lunch with an empty box too many times. I am directly affected by this legislation. Therefore, I ask you today to fulfill your responsibility and obligations to the people. And to safeguard their human rights by giving a DO PASS recommendation to this honorable bill. And I thank you for all the work you've done for the students of North Dakota.

Carter Hass.