



Testimony on HB 1553
National Association of Social Workers – North Dakota Chapter
House Education Committee
February 10, 2025

Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee:

The National Association of Social Workers—North Dakota Chapter (NASW-ND) strongly **supports HB 1553**, which addresses the critical need to fund free school meal programs for all students in both public and nonpublic schools.

Education plays a critical role in shaping children’s development, and NASW believes all students should have access to a quality education in a safe, supportive environment. Hunger can significantly impede academic performance, leading to poor outcomes and higher absenteeism. For this reason, NASW-ND emphasizes the importance of HB 1553. By guaranteeing that all students, regardless of their financial situation, receive the nutrition they need, the bill aims to remove these barriers to academic success.

The bill’s provisions align with NASW-ND's advocacy for comprehensive support services for students, particularly those who are homeless, disabled, or living in poverty. By ensuring access to free meals, the bill directly addresses the needs of these students, helping them overcome food insecurity so they can focus on their education.

Furthermore, NASW advocates for school social workers who support students' academic and emotional needs. By ensuring access to free meals, HB 1553 helps alleviate the pressures that hinder students’ ability to focus on learning and well-being, thus fostering a more equitable educational environment. Social workers, who are committed to promoting the well-being of families and communities, view this bill as a crucial step in ensuring that all students have access to basic human needs, including proper nutrition.

In conclusion, NASW-ND is proud of the bipartisan support for HB 1553, which will significantly improve the lives of North Dakota's children by ensuring they have the resources needed to thrive both academically and emotionally. We urge the committee to recommend a **"Do Pass"** for this vital policy, which addresses both immediate needs and long-term outcomes for students.

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