



North Dakota Small Organized Schools

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1 Testimony in Support of HB 1553

2 Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee,

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4 My name is Michael Heilman, Executive Director of the North Dakota Small Organized Schools. I am here
5 today to express my support for HB 1553 on behalf of the members of NDSOS. HB 1553 seeks to
6 allocate \$140 million from the Legacy Fund to provide breakfast and lunch for all students in North
7 Dakota’s public and non-public schools.

8 Ensuring that all students—regardless of whether they attend public or non-public schools—receive
9 access to school meals is an important step toward educational equity. Hunger does not discriminate
10 based on the type of school a child attends, and neither should our policies. By covering meals for all
11 students, HB 1553 fosters an environment where every child can focus on learning rather than worrying
12 about where their next meal will come from.

13 With rising costs of food and living expenses, many families struggle to provide consistent, nutritious
14 meals for their children. The financial burden of school meals, even for families who do not qualify for
15 assistance under current programs, can be significant. By ensuring that all students receive free
16 breakfast and lunch, this bill provides meaningful relief to families, allowing them to redirect resources
17 toward other essential expenses, such as housing, healthcare, and educational opportunities.
18 Good nutrition is critical for cognitive function, concentration, and overall academic performance.
19 Studies have consistently shown that students who have access to healthy meals perform better in
20 school, have improved attendance, and exhibit fewer behavioral issues. Conversely, food insecurity can
21 lead to difficulties in focusing, increased absenteeism, and long-term negative educational outcomes. By
22 ensuring that all students have access to nutritious meals, HB 1553 directly supports academic success
23 and the well-being of North Dakota’s children. This bill is an investment in our children, our families, and
24 our future, ensuring that every student has access to the nutrition they need to succeed in school and
25 beyond.

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27 For these reasons, I urge you to support HB 1553 and ensure that no child in our state goes hungry at
28 school. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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The mission of NDSOS is to provide leadership for the small/rural schools in North Dakota and to support legislation favorable to their philosophy while opposing legislation that is harmful.