

1 HB 1553 –House Education Committee – By: Michelle Wagner, RD, SNS, Child
2 Nutrition Program Director Bismarck Public School District, Legislative Chair
3 North Dakota School Nutrition Association

4 Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee:

5 My name is Michelle Wagner, and I am the Child Nutrition Program Director for
6 Bismarck Public Schools and the Legislative Chair for the North Dakota School
7 Nutrition Association.

8 Last week, I had the opportunity to highlight the economic advantages of
9 implementing free meals for all students. Today, I want to address a couple of other
10 issues, first being a potential decrease in meal applications resulting in a reduction
11 of federal funding. Many schools link other benefits to these applications, such as
12 reduced fees for activities, ACT/SAT exams, dual credit courses, afterschool
13 childcare, and even parks and recreation programs. While the USDA does not allow
14 districts to require all parents to complete a meal application, schools have the
15 flexibility at the district level to require all parents to complete a benefit form. This
16 benefit form would follow the same federal eligibility guidelines as the meal
17 application. If parents want to continue receiving other benefits, some form will
18 have to be completed annually helping to secure federal funding.

19 Next, I want to shift the focus on a more personal and pressing issue: that children
20 are still going hungry during the school day. I’m going to share real examples with
21 you of ND students being excluded from the school meal programs due to the
22 financial burden it places on families.

1 Recently, I received an email from a Bismarck Public Schools social worker stating:
2 We have a family of three here, lunch accounts are at negative 100 dollars each. The
3 kids **did not eat** today because dad told them he can't afford it. The next day, the
4 students were brought to school late without having breakfast and were again told
5 by dad they **could not eat**. The social worker acted quickly to get these children the
6 help they needed, but no child should ever have to endure such a situation.

7 In another school district, which asked to remain anonymous, stated two siblings
8 came to school, one of the siblings had a bruise on her face. When asked what
9 happened, the student stated they got in trouble because of their negative lunch
10 balance and was told if your **sister doesn't need to eat, neither do you**. In this same
11 district a guardian wrote a letter stating that due to the negative lunch balance, her
12 student would only be allowed a lunch from home. The lunches this child was
13 provided from home included only Oreo cookies; no other food was included.
14 Although the school district involved in these two incidents has requested to remain
15 unnamed, I want to make you aware that the House Representative from this district
16 is present in this committee hearing.

17 Even though the Anti-Lunch Shaming Bill has been passed, it hasn't eliminated the
18 issue of students going hungry during the school day. Child nutrition programs
19 continue to feed students regardless of their balance, but these examples show that
20 when parents are financially strained, and they don't want their child's negative
21 lunch balance to grow, it is ultimately the child that is left hungry and unable to
22 learn.

23 I urge you to think about these children—think about the child who has been abused,
24 the children denied food at the parent's directive and the parents not providing

1 adequate nutrition for their children during the school day. Ask yourself if the Anti-
2 Lunch Shaming Bill has done enough for the children of North Dakota, and whether
3 the potential loss of some federal funding is worth the cost of not providing free
4 meals to all children. This concludes my testimony, and I will stand for any
5 questions.