



January 21, 2026

HB 1623: Rural Health Transformation Funding

Ann Prifrel, CEO of the Great Plains Food Bank

Mr. Chairmen and members of the Joint Appropriations Committee,

My name is Ann Prifrel, and I am the newly appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Great Plains Food Bank. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1623, the Rural Health Transformation Funding appropriation bill.

Since joining the Great Plains Food Bank, I have been deeply impressed by North Dakota's commitment to addressing hunger, improving health outcomes, and investing in community-based solutions. I want to begin by sincerely thanking the Legislature for its continued partnership and support. Last session, you demonstrated a long-term commitment to ending hunger through a \$5 million appropriation toward the construction of a new food bank facility, which will significantly expand our capacity to serve communities across the state for decades to come. You also recognized the immediate needs of our neighbors through a \$1.5 million investment to purchase and distribute protein, helping families put food on the table when they needed it most. We are grateful to work alongside you to ensure our neighbors have the food they need today, while also building systems that reduce hunger in the future.

More recently, I would like to thank the Governor's office and the Department of Health and Human Services for their swift execution and collaboration during the federal government shutdown, which created uncertainty around SNAP and impacted approximately 57,000 North Dakotans. Through this partnership and the generosity of our communities, we were able to secure and distribute more than 1.6 million pounds of food in November, reaching families at a critical moment and demonstrating the power of effective public-private collaboration.

For context, the Great Plains Food Bank is North Dakota's only statewide food bank, serving all 53 counties through a network of more than 200 partner agencies, including food pantries, shelters, and community organizations. Over the past year, more than 160,000 children, seniors, and families utilized our services. These include working families, individuals in rural communities where access to healthy food is often limited, and seniors striving to stretch limited budgets. Our work goes beyond food sourcing and distribution and includes building partnerships with organizations that recognize food as a critical component of health and well-being.

We strongly support the Rural Health Transformation Funding and the Legislature's continued investment in initiatives that advance preventive care and promote healthy eating under the goal to "Make North Dakota Healthy Again." We know that food insecurity is not solved by food alone—it also requires addressing the health, education, and awareness factors that influence a person's long-term well-being.

We are encouraged by the Eat Well North Dakota framework to strengthen nutrition education and improve access to healthy foods statewide. The focus on integrating training for families and providers, while partnering with communities and local grocery stores represents a thoughtful and comprehensive approach to improving health outcomes. Efforts to enhance rural food distribution, support SNAP technology, and embed nutrition into healthcare, education, and community initiatives are especially important in a largely rural state.

If the opportunity were to arise, the Great Plains Food Bank would be grateful to partner with the Department of Health and Human Services in advancing the goals of Eat Well North Dakota. As North Dakota's only statewide food bank, we bring established infrastructure, trusted relationships, and experience connecting food access with nutrition education and health-focused initiatives.

Through a potential partnership, the Great Plains Food Bank could help support program goals by:

- Improving access to healthy foods through community and retail partnerships
- Strengthening rural food distribution systems
- Supporting SNAP-related technology and education
- Helping integrate nutrition into healthcare, childcare, and community-based settings through programs such as our Wellness Clinic Pantries, Backpack Program, Kitchen Coalition Program, and School Pantry Programs

Thank you for your leadership, your continued investment in North Dakota communities, and your consideration of the Rural Health Transformation Funding and the DHHS appropriation bill. I look forward to working together to build a healthier North Dakota.

Respectfully,

Ann Prifrel

Chief Executive Officer

Great Plains Food Bank