



*Representing the Diocese of Fargo  
and the Diocese of Bismarck*

103 South Third Street  
Suite 10  
Bismarck ND 58501  
701-223-2519  
ndcatholic.org  
ndcatholic@ndcatholic.org

**To:** House Joint Appropriations Committee  
**From:** David Tamisiea, Executive Director  
**Subject:** House Bill 1624 - Universal School Meals  
**Date:** January 21, 2026

The North Dakota Catholic Conference supports House Bill 1624.

HB 1624 would provide one breakfast and one lunch each school day to students enrolled in K-12 schools in North Dakota at no cost to the student or the student's family. Public schools are required to participate in this universal school meal program, and nonpublic schools, tribal schools, and schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Education may opt in to the program.

The North Dakota Catholic Conference supports HB 1624 for the following reasons:

**Better Student Health and Improved Learning Outcomes:** Ensuring students receive a nutritional breakfast and lunch each school day is expected to improve learning outcomes. Students attending school without having healthy meals experience significant negative impacts, including poor concentration, memory issues, behavioral problems, more frequent illness and absenteeism, difficulty learning, and lower test scores, as hunger and poor nutrition directly hinder cognitive function and health.<sup>1</sup>

**Strong Support Among North Dakotans for Universal School Meals:** As reported recently in the Fargo Forum, StrongND, a 501(c)(4) political advocacy organization associated with Governor Armstrong, conducted a poll from January 10-14, 2026, of mostly Republican-leaning and conservative voters in North Dakota, to gauge their support for a universal school meal program in North Dakota.<sup>2</sup> The results showed 65% in support vs 32% opposed. Widespread support among North Dakotans for universal school meals is also suggested by the proposed citizen-initiated ballot measure for November 2026 seeking to amend the North Dakota Constitution which mirrors HB 1624.

**Alleviates Financial Burdens on Families:** Universal school meals provide needed relief for families today struggling to make ends meet due to inflationary pressures and the high cost of living. This burden is keenly felt by families with children in nonpublic schools. HB 1624 would benefit all North Dakota students and their families and, because it would be a

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<sup>1</sup> "How Does Hunger Affect Learning?", on NoKidHungry website, at <https://www.nokidhungry.org/blog/how-does-hunger-affect-learning> (accessed January 20, 2026)

<sup>2</sup> "Poll shows support for universal school lunches in North Dakota," Rob Port, *Fargo Forum* (January 19, 2026), at <https://www.inforum.com/opinion/columns/port-poll-shows-strong-support-for-universal-school-lunches-in-north-dakota> (accessed January 20, 2026)

statutory law, could more readily be modified and adjusted by the North Dakota Legislature to fit future needs and circumstances.

We urge a **Do Pass** recommendation on House Bill 1624.