

**Testimony of Shane Goettle
on behalf of Solving Hunger, Tusk Philanthropies**

**Chairman Bekkedahl & Chairman Vigesaa
North Dakota Joint Appropriations Committee
January 21, 2026**

HB 1624

Chairmen Bekkedahl and Vigesaa and members of the Joint Appropriations Committee, my name is Shane Goettle and today I am presenting testimony for *Solving Hunger*, a project of Tusk Philanthropies, that is dedicated to ending child hunger.

Solving Hunger is working in North Dakota because of our state's decision to expand school meals in the last two sessions. They are encouraging us to do more to ensure that all children have the nutrition they need. HB 1624 is the answer. Hungry kids can't learn.

Solving Hunger has been involved with this work for nearly ten years, in 27 states. In addition to North Dakota, the organization is working this year in Virginia, Kentucky, New Jersey, and South Carolina, where last week, **Governor Henry McMaster** announced funding for universal school breakfast in his recommended budget to the legislature.

"I think the system would operate better if it were universal," Governor McMaster said. "The cost is minimal compared to the positive impact."

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders of Arkansas has been a leader for free breakfast for all students. She has expanded her efforts there, launching an initiative which will improve child nutrition and support farmers and producers across the state, giving kids more access to fresh, locally sourced products served in schools.

Solving Hunger agrees with these Governors. When every child is offered meals at school, it's an efficient and direct benefit to kids. In states that have implemented free school meals for every child, kids are healthier, attendance in school improves, test scores rise, graduation rates increase, and kids are happier since they no longer face stigma. Their parents are saving \$1,200-\$1,500 per child per school year, which also makes school meals an answer to the affordability issues that families face today.

Solving Hunger applauds Department of Public Instruction, whose leaders have worked closely with them over the years to learn what's happening in other states, and for the philanthropy to understand the unique challenges in North Dakota, especially in rural areas.

Local parents, teachers, and organizations dedicated to health of North Dakota residents have worked for years to bring this issue to the forefront, and *Solving Hunger* applauds them. They know what the philanthropy has seen in every other state in which they've worked: Feeding kids is enormously popular across states, no matter size, urban/rural characteristics of a state, or political differences. In poll after poll across the nation, red states and blue, more than 80% of voters want to make sure kids don't go hungry and they agree that the best way to do that is by making sure they eat at school.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify and thank you for your work on behalf of North Dakota's children.