

I'm writing to share my perspective on HB 1624, which currently proposes fully free school meals for all North Dakota students. While I deeply support the bill's goal of ensuring every child has access to nutritious food during the school day, I believe the state could better balance family support with long-term fiscal responsibility by amending the bill to create a universally reduced, subsidized lunch program instead of a fully free one.

Recent legislative reporting estimates that a fully universal meal program could cost the state around \$65 million annually, with projections suggesting costs may continue to rise in future bienniums. Lawmakers have expressed concerns that such mandated spending may limit the state's financial flexibility in years when revenues decline. At the same time, one in seven North Dakota children lives in poverty, demonstrating a clear need for accessible, affordable meals statewide. [\[kfgo.com\]](#), [\[inforum.com\]](#) [\[kfgo.com\]](#) [\[dennpl.com\]](#)

From my own experience as an educator, I see firsthand how much families appreciate support with meal costs—and how essential it is that students are well-fed in order to learn. But I also recognize the importance of maintaining financial fidelity at the state level. A universally reduced, subsidized lunch model would continue to ease the burden on families while avoiding the steep and unpredictable costs of a fully free system. Some lawmakers have already explored broader eligibility expansions—such as supporting families up to 300% of the federal poverty level—as a more sustainable alternative that still meaningfully benefits students. [\[newsfromth...states.com\]](#)

This approach would also reduce stigma and paperwork barriers, which currently prevent some families from applying for free or reduced meals. A universal reduction, rather than fully free meals, would keep participation high and predictable and help ensure that no child is singled out based on family income. [\[dennpl.com\]](#)

For these reasons, I respectfully urge consideration of an amendment to HB 1624 that adopts a universally reduced, subsidized school meal program. This balanced solution supports families, protects the state's financial future, and keeps the focus on student well-being—where it belongs.

Thank you for your time,

Laura Mibeck