

Dear North Dakota Legislators,

I am writing in support of HB 1624 and, more importantly, in support of providing meaningful relief to North Dakota families across our state's education system.

I am grateful for my childhood experience attending small, Class B public schools – Ray Public School from 1996-2004, and Tioga High School from 2005-2009. Growing up, I had no awareness of what school meals cost, and I do not recall a single instance of a student being denied a meal. My family had limited financial means, and it is my understanding that we qualified for reduced-price meals. Even so, meal costs were never a visible burden for my parents, nor was access to food ever a concern for me during my school years.

Today, my wife and I have two children, one of whom began kindergarten this past fall. While we are fortunate to have stable careers and relative success, enrolling our daughter in a private school was not an easy decision. We ultimately chose private education because we believe it is the best fit for her, both academically and personally. Our decision was influenced largely by our daughter's unique, visible physical condition of her hand, and our desire was to place her in a setting where she could thrive with fewer social and self-esteem challenges. As parents, we made the choice to prioritize her well-being over financial implications, accepting the risks that come with that decision.

I recognize that our situation may be unique, but I also know that families like ours are not alone. Parents make educational choices for many valid reasons, and I am not here to debate the merits of public versus private education. I am a product of small-town public schools and now a parent navigating private education in today's higher cost environment, and I greatly appreciate both systems. My point is simply this: regardless of school choice, no child should have to worry about whether they will be able to eat at school, and no family should face additional financial stress in the lunchroom.

North Dakota has the resources and the opportunity to make a lasting, generational impact on the lives of its children. I strongly encourage you to work alongside your constituents to ensure that ALL children, regardless of where their parents choose to enroll, have access to meals without financial burden.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,

Brett Tinnes
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