

Chair and members of the committee,

I am a Licensed, Registered Dietitian and a parent of teenage children in North Dakota schools, and I strongly support providing free breakfast and lunch for all students.

Adequate nutrition is directly linked to academic success and health. Research shows that students who participate in school meal programs have improved attention, higher test scores, and fewer behavioral issues compared to peers who are food insecure. School meals are designed to meet federal nutrition standards and often provide more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein than meals children may otherwise consume.

Food insecurity affects families across income levels. According to USDA data, even households above the poverty threshold experience periods of food insecurity due to rising food costs, housing expenses, and unstable incomes. Universal free meals eliminate stigma, increase participation, and ensure that all children have consistent access to nutritious food during the school day.

From a parent's perspective, school meals provide reliability. Even in households that plan carefully, busy mornings, long commutes, and extracurricular schedules can result in children starting the school day without adequate nutrition. Universal access ensures no child is distracted by hunger while trying to learn.

Providing free breakfast and lunch for all students is an investment in North Dakota's children, education system, and future workforce.

Thank you for your consideration.

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