

My name is Landis Larson, President of the North Dakota AFL-CIO. The North Dakota AFL-CIO is the federation of labor unions in North Dakota, representing the interests of all working people in our state.

This session we have heard time and time again that the state doesn't have the money to provide universal school meals. If that is true, we definitely do not have the money for private school vouchers.

We've heard from legislators time and time again that they are against "paying for wealthy families' school meals" and therefore must means-test to ensure that we are only providing free meals for kids who "truly need it". Does this same logic also apply to subsidizing private school tuition?

The most glaring discrepancy though, is the most damning of this hypocrisy. All children, no matter their parents wealth or family situation, require basic nutrition to make it through the day. That is a biological fact.

It's common sense that in our society, a child's right to basic nutrition should trump a few parents' desire for the luxury of a private education. This is a "want" not a "need". That is also a biological fact.

In uncertain economic times where we are facing the real possibility of rapidly increasing food prices, looming federal cuts to important programs that help feed many working families in ND, loss of jobs and family income due to tariffs, we need to be using our state tax dollars to deal with these upcoming issues instead of helping a handful of families with a "want" instead of preparing for the very real needs of our working families.

Why is this even a debate?

We stand in solidarity with our public schools and educators and do not want to see any funding going towards private school tuition.

We recommend a "DO NOT PASS" on HB 1540.