

Testimony in Opposition to SB2303

Chairman Beard and Members of the Committee,

My name is Leslie Bieber and I am the Superintendent of Alexander Public School. I am in opposition to Senate Bill 2303.

Impact on Public Schools and Rural Districts

Public education serves as the foundation of our democracy, ensuring every child has access to a free and fair education. By diverting public funds away from public schools, we risk weakening the very institutions that serve the majority of North Dakota's students, especially in small, rural communities where public schools are often the only viable option.

Redirecting ESA Funds for Universal School Meals

If the Legislature is committed to ensuring all students benefit from state funding, a more effective and equitable use of these funds would be to guarantee free breakfast and lunch for every student in North Dakota. No matter where a child receives their education—public, private, or home school—all children need access to nutritious meals to thrive.

By **redirecting ESA funds to universal school meals**, North Dakota can:

- **Combine multiple bills**—including those supporting school meal debt relief, the free meals bill, and various ESA proposals—into a single, comprehensive policy.
- **Save the state money** by eliminating duplicative funding mechanisms and ensuring funds are used efficiently.
- **Support every student** in North Dakota, regardless of where they receive their education.

Providing universal school meals would:

- Ensure no child in North Dakota goes hungry during the school day.
- Support families by alleviating the financial burden of meal costs.
- Improve student focus, behavior, and academic outcomes.

Using ESA funds to cover the cost of school meals would benefit every student by still supporting their education choice.

Senate Bill 2303 undermines the principles of public education by diverting taxpayer dollars to schools that are not subject to the same public accountability. Rather than creating an inequitable funding structure that benefits a select few, I urge the Legislature to redirect these funds toward a universal meal program that serves **every** child in North Dakota, ensuring that no student goes hungry, regardless of where they receive their education.

I respectfully ask this committee to oppose SB 2303. Thank you for your time and consideration.