

Chairman Thomas and Members of the Committee,

My name is Heather Gades, and I am a titleholder at the local level within the Miss America Organization and a contestant for Miss North Dakota this coming June – however, my testimony does not necessarily reflect the views of either the Miss America Organization or the Miss North Dakota Organization. My current title is Miss Bonanzaville, and as a titleholder, we each select a service initiative that we want to support and work on during our year of service. Mine is Combatting Food Insecurity – One Box at a Time, a project that is the culmination of my six years of working on this issue. I have met with food pantries in the Fargo-Moorhead area – and volunteered at a few of them, helped create the first food pantry at North Dakota State University (NDSU) called Goods for the Herd and am currently on the advisory board, attended strategy and conversational meetings, and read books to school children that talk about food insecurity, how it can happen to anyone, and who we can go to for help.

North Dakota is often called the “breadbasket” of America, for all of the wheat that we grow. Yet we have at least 13 areas in our state that are identified as having low access to food, especially food that is healthy and nutritious. These areas are called food deserts, and they are primarily in the central part of ND, though there are some parts of Eastern counties that also have food deserts. In 2022, the Great Plains Food Bank reported their most recent findings, which indicate that 1 in 6 people in ND are food insecure – which is a person having low or no food access, particularly to food high in minerals and nutrients. To clarify, a food desert is a geographical area that has low or no food access, food insecurity is a person or family that has low or no food access. The reality is that North Dakota has a food security

issue – which has only gotten worse over the last three years. Fargo’s Emergency Food Bank has been serving more families each month than they normally do around the holiday season. Great Plains Food Bank’s services are in high demand across the state. The lines at pantries stretch out the door, and the shelves run bare at many. There are so many groups and people working to end this hunger problem, but it’s hard to do it city by city or region by region.

What North Dakota really needs is for the state to take this situation seriously. One big step in tackling food insecurity and food deserts would be the creation of the taskforce suggested in HB 1471. This would bring many key people in the fight against hunger to the table to work together and make a difference for our citizens, young, old, and everyone in between. I would suggest one addition though. While the people listed for this task force are vital to be part of this, there is a lack of local community representation. I would like to see a few more people from around the state who have lived experience dealing with this issue already. Local representation is needed in matters like this. Specifically, at least one person from each region should be added to the task force. This would be only six additional people if you base the regions on geography. As for how to choose the people from each region, it should be application and interview based, so the best candidates possible are selected.

I urge the committee to give HB 1471 a “Do Pass” recommendation, with the proposed amendment, and take a major step forward in the efforts to combat food insecurity in our state.

Thank you for your time Chairman Thomas and Members of the Committee.

Heather Gades, Miss Bonanzaville 2023