

HB 1471

Thank you Chairman Thomas and members of the Ag Committee.

I am Representative LaurieBeth Hager, from District 21 in Fargo. My district encompasses the older, original core neighborhoods of Fargo and a small portion of West Fargo. It is a few blocks north and south of Main Avenue along the railroad tracks that run through the cities. My district includes several impoverished neighborhoods and several entities that provide assistance to others.

I bring to you today, HB 1471 a bill to establish a statewide Food Insecurity Task Force that would bring together several state agencies with the mission to address Hunger and Food Insecurity issues across the state of ND and to develop strategies to combat food insecurity. The members of the Food Insecurity Task Force would include a person from Agriculture Department, the Department of Public Instruction, the Commerce Department and the Department of Health and Human Services, two members of the legislature, and two persons from nonprofit agencies.

What is the difference hunger and food insecurity? In a way hunger is that feeling at 11:45 before lunch in the cafeteria. However Food Insecurity is that feeling with you are hungry but there is nothing in the fridge or cupboards and there probably will not be anything regularly in them in the near future.

Is Hunger and Food Insecurity an issue in ND? Yes. Food Insecurity exists in all corners, all counties of our state. The people who are here to testify will provide you with specific statistics. But first I would like to share my observations and my experiences.

For the past several years, I have been involved with programs that have addressed Food Insecurity which is defined as the “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and save food, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”

I supervised an AmeriCorps Vista program associated with the Prairie Roots Community Fund that addressed hunger and food insecurity issues in the Madison Neighborhood of my district which qualifies as a food desert. One of the outcomes of this project was a drive up food distribution center which became a

site for the Great Plains Food Bank. For the past 2 and a half years I have helped to distribute food to those in need. Currently about 200 families receive produce twice per month. I see their faces and hear their gratitude as they receive apples, potatoes, onions and some dairy products. Many weeks the cars line up an hour ahead of time.

I have also been involved with The Cass Clay Hunger Coalition. This is group of individuals representing various agencies and non profit organizations. The Cass Clay Hunger Coalition meets monthly to focus on specific tasks or topics, to improve strategies, to coordinate resources and efforts to meet the needs of hungry and food insecure persons and families. This Coalition sponsors a yearly Hunger Summit and conducts assessments to determine the unmet needs in the Fargo Moorhead and surrounding areas.

It is this model that is the basis for what HB 1471 is proposing to do on a statewide level: bring together state agencies and nonprofit organizations to strategically combat Food Insecurity across the state of ND.

During the Covid Pandemic of 2020-2022, there was the realization that people and families were desperately in need of food. Our state as well as others experienced food supply chain issues and cities and schools in our state were not able to get their shipments of food.

When the COVID relief moneys became available, agencies and organizations worked together and the needs of individuals and families were addressed. HB 1471 will establish a Food Insecurity Task Force to continue those efforts. The underlying conditions leading to Food Insecurity are multifaceted and a multi agency approach will enable innovate strategies to be developed to combat Food Insecurity and Hunger in our state.

On Tuesday night, Governor Burgum put out this statement, "Our farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs, energy producers can reestablish American dominance in feeding and fueling the world." I agree and I believe that right here in ND would be the best place to start this innovated process and that a ND Task Force on Food Insecurity would be the first step.

Thank you Chairman Thomas and members of the Ag Committee. I am here to answer your questions or listen to your ideas.