

Dear Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

My testimony is in favor of House Bill 1494. I ask that you give this bill a Do Pass.

I have submitted testimony for HB 1491, which relates to funding for school lunches. Within that testimony I describe the importance of feeding our youth and the wish to make school lunch less complicated and more accessible to each student. That in the perfect world these kids wouldn't have to think about if they're going to get fed or not.

I made that case to support allocating funding for this cause. HB 1494 creates policies we want to make sure we are not failing youth. I'm a suicide prevention advocate and we know access to food is a key component of a youth's mental health and wellbeing. On the hierarchy of needs it is absolutely fundamental.

Our kids are struggling in North Dakota, according to the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#).

- 26% of middle school students seriously consider suicide (65% for LGB Youth)
- 38% of middle school students experience bullying
- 75% of middle school students did not speak to parents when they felt sad, empty, hopeless or angry

When we look at these numbers and a kid has a lunch taken away or is shamed for not paying or denied other school functions because of this—what happens to these numbers? Do they go down or up?

How might family dynamics be impacted by the additional stress put on parents who are already probably struggling? If a parent is violent or prone to violence, what may the home look like when they get a collection agency after them or their kid giving them a letter? And does the kid deserve that?

The more we can do to ease the stress of these situations the better. The less kids ever have to worry or think about where their next meal comes from the better we're doing as a society. I don't know what is possible in our state, but I do know the very real consequences of when kids can't eat at school, experience shame over it, or are in unsafe homes.

It is for these reasons I urge you to consider voting Do Pass. Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state.

Best regards,
Faye Seidler