

Testimony Prepared for the  
**House Education Committee**  
January 30, 2023

By: Julie St Germaine, Director of Central Prairie Human Service Zone  
serving the counties of Eddy, Foster, and Wells.

**RE: HB 1494: A bill for an Act to provide payment for school meals.**

Chairman Heinert, and Members of the Committee. My name is Julie St Germaine, I am providing testimony in favor of HB 1494, in its current form. I am a member of the Human Service Zone Director's Association of North Dakota. The ND Human Service Zone Director Association supports this bill ending practices that harm children due to their parents' inability to pay for their school lunches. We support funding of school lunch for all students, regardless of their ability to pay. Hunger is a real issue, plaguing our school children. Without healthy meals, children tend to show diminished capabilities in the classroom. Human Service Zones support healthy meals for healthy families and children. I am strongly urging a due pass on this HB 1494.

Please note the following definition of “Identified Relative” in North Dakota’s child welfare policy:

*“Identified Relative” means the child’s grandparent, great-grandparent, sibling, half-sibling, aunt, great-aunt, uncle, great-uncle, nephew, niece or first cousin. An individual with a relationship to the children, derived through a current or former spouse of the child’s parent, similar to a relationship described in the first sentence. **An individual recognized in the child’s community as having a relationship with the child similar to a relationship described in the first sentence;** A child’s stepparent. (NDCC 50-11).*

Because foster families have already been in a caregiving role for a child, they already have some elevated standing when considering adoptive options. However, this caregiving role, should not blindly supersede biological familial connections to the child.

*The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 requires that states “consider giving **preference to adult relative caregivers over non-relative caregivers when considering placement of a child.** This is consistent with the philosophy of placing a child in the “least restrictive environment.”*

The language in this proposed bill does allow exception for cases in which the Indian Child Welfare Act applies. This federal law seeks to keep Indian children with their Indian families after evidence indicated a large number of Indian children were being removed from their families and placed with non-Indian families. We want to have similar protections of family, culture and community for all children.

Thank you for considering of my testimony relating to this bill. I stand for any questions the committee may have.