



NDSBA
NORTH DAKOTA SCHOOL
BOARDS ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 7128
Bismarck ND 58507-7128
1-800-932-8791 • (701)255-4127
www.ndsba.org

HB 1494
Senate Education | March 13, 2023
Testimony of Alexis Baxley

Good afternoon, Chairman Elkin, and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Alexis Baxley, and I serve as the executive director of the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents the elected school boards of all 170 public school districts and several special education units in North Dakota.

I am here today with conditional support of HB 1494. As you are likely aware, school lunch debt can be a very significant issue in many of our schools. School districts are very aware of the very real effect proper nutrition has on a student's ability to learn; hungry children are not ready to learn.

While many, if not most, districts have moved away from the "shaming" type policies referenced in HB 1494, they still wish to retain the ability to send bills to collections *only when absolutely necessary*. While many districts have been lucky to have local businesses and supporters contribute towards unpaid debt, others have used general fund monies to cover the deficit. Districts do not send every negative balance to collections – they are often aware of the likelihood of payment or other situations and take these factors into consideration when deciding whether or not to use a collection agency. Unfortunately, if districts are prohibited from using a collections agency or using any other form of incentive to encourage payment, I am not sure why any parent would ever have reason to pay for school lunches. I realize disincentivizing payment is not the intent of this bill, but it could very well have that effect. Unpaid balances will likely surpass public appetite and the ability of district funds to cover them. For this reason, we are supportive of the amendments presented by Representative Ista. Retaining the ability to send these debts to collections would allow districts to feed students without increasing the odds of negative fiscal impact. With their adoption, we could throw our full support behind the bill.

I respectfully ask that you consider the amendments submitted by Representative Ista, and with them would encourage you to give HB 1494 a do-pass recommendation. Thank you.