

Testimony for HB 1143

Date Hearing: March 13th, 2025

Dear Chair Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture and Veteran Affairs Committee,

I am Stacey Ackerman, Vice Chair of the Great Plains Food Bank and have been a board member for over 5 years.

I have had a passion for the mission ever since hearing the story of my father, who lost his father when he was around 5 years old. My Grandmother Rose brought in laundry for income to do her best to feed her family, but there were many nights that there was not anything to eat. At that time, there were no organizations like the Great Plains Food Bank to help. Now, 75 years later, we still have neighbors who are going to bed hungry. Students who arrive at school on Monday mornings are not ready to learn. Seniors who face trade-offs between their medicine or food, both are vital for health. Parents who face the choice of keeping their lights on or fixing their car versus buying food for dinner. Food and hunger are basic needs, but hunger is a workforce issue. Hunger is an education issue. Hunger is a health issue.

We are truly blessed to be in North Dakota with abundant resources and with agriculture as our most significant economic driver. Our farmers and ranchers feed the world. We are blessed with low unemployment at just over 2% and a strong education system. However, we face unique challenges with transportation, access to medical care, and wages not keeping up with inflation.

The Great Plains Food Bank does essential work to ensure that the citizens in every county of North Dakota have healthy food, so that they can do their best at school, work, and home. They also work tirelessly to keep good food out of landfills. But every day, we make tradeoffs of what we can support effectively with our staff, finances, and our facilities in Bismarck and Fargo. We have come to a time where our current building no longer meets our needs.

We are in dire need of a building that can ensure that we continue to support the hundreds of communities across the entire state. This new facility will also us to more efficiently recover food, educate our citizens on healthy food choices and preparation, and engage more effectively with our volunteers, employees, communities, and neighbors. We have made do, but as Melissa shared, the costs of maintenance are no longer serving us and in many cases there are no more easy or quick fixes. Furthermore, nationally, there is an awareness of how food impacts our health, and we can be at the forefront of that movement in North Dakota. We really do have the opportunity to be the first hunger-free state in the nation and this investment will help us get there.

We ask you to support an investment in our infrastructure thereby helping us build for the future as we continue to serve our children, seniors, Veterans, and caregivers.

"It was once said that the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and..." - Hubert H. Humphrey

Thank you for your consideration, and on behalf of the board of directors, we ask for your support of HB1143.

Respectfully,
Stacey Ackerman