2025 HOUSE EDUCATION

HB 1475

#### 2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

#### **Education Committee**

Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

HB 1475 2/3/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to providing breakfast and lunch to all students of participating entities, including school districts, nonpublic schools, and tribal schools, at no cost to the student.

2:32 p.m. Vice Chairman Schreiber-Beck called the meeting to order.

Members present: Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber-Beck, Representatives Hager, Hatlestad, Hauck, Heilman, Jonas, Longmuir, Maki, Marschall, Morton, Novak, Osowski

### **Discussion Topics:**

- School Meals in North Dakota
- Healthy Meals for Schools
- North Dakota Free School Lunches
- 2:34 p.m. Representative Hatlestad introduced the Bill, Representative of North Dakota, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33964.
- 2:41 p.m. Landis Larson, President of North Dakota AFL CIO, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33564.
- 2:44 p.m. Nick Archuleta, President of United, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33676.
- 2:46 p.m. Michelle Wagner, Child Nutrition Program Director, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33665.
- 2:50 p.m. Aimee Copas, Executive Director of the North Dakota of National Leaders, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33650.
- 2:57 p.m. Patrick Hart, North Dakota Resident, testified in favor.
- 3:00 p.m. Deven Mantz, North Dakota Legislative Director, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33566.
- 3:03 p.m. Matt Perdue, Government Relations Director, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33901.
- 3:04 p.m. Amy Heuer, Co-Executive Director, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33873.

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3:09 p.m. Lexi Bergstrom, Staff Attorney at North Dakota School Board Association, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33656

3:10 p.m. Daniel Walz, North Dakota Resident, testified in favor.

3:13 p.m. Lynelle Johnson, Director of Child Nutrition and Food Distribution, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33849.

3:22 p.m. Chairman Heinert closed the hearing.

### Additional written testimony:

#33809, #33094, #33265, #33276, #33307, #33336, #33358, #33380, #33382, #33415, #33462, #33491, #33508, #33538, #33541, #33567, #33618, #33635, #33643, #33664, #33669, #33711, #33712, #33737, #33748, #33750, #33756, #33761, #33767, #33770, #33808, #33813, #33818, #33829, #33833, #33850, #33861, #33864, #33888, #33892, #33900, #33909, #33918

3:22 p.m. Chairman Heinert closed the meeting.

Sierra Schartz, Committee Clerk

January 30, 2025

Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee:

I am writing as a North Dakota parent to ask that you consider voting to pass HB 1475.

North Dakota is a very fortunate state to have the ability to afford this and I believe it should be a priority for our state to make sure every child can eat at school without having to apply for free meals. I understand that we already have a process in place to allow those who need it to receive free or reduced meals. HOWEVER, this requires the parents to actually apply for this and sadly this doesn't always happen. Children shouldn't be punished because their parents aren't able to complete the necessary forms.

My family is very fortunate to be able to afford meals for our children currently, but we have experienced times of great financial stress when we've had to rely on support from others. During this time, including when free school meals were available during COVID, we could not have survived without this financial support.

We all know that inflation has struck us all hard and not having to worry about paying for school meals could be a lifesaver for many families. Additionally, I think there could be an added bonus of approving HB 1475 in that families may use the money saved to put back in our communities by being able to spend more locally.

Please support HB 1475.

Respectfully submitted,
Janet Anderson
Burlington, ND

## **Statement of Support for House Bill 1475**

1/31/2025

#### **Dear Members of the House Education Committee,**

I am writing as a parent to express my strong support for House Bill 1475, which seeks to provide breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students of participating school districts, nonpublic schools, and tribal schools across North Dakota. This legislation represents a critical step toward ensuring the health, well-being, and academic success of our students.

Access to nutritious meals is essential for the physical and cognitive development of children. Research consistently shows that students who are well-fed are better able to focus, perform academically, and engage in the classroom. Unfortunately, many families face financial barriers that prevent them from consistently providing nutritious meals for their children. By offering healthy school meals to all students at no cost, this bill removes the stigma associated with free or reduced-price meals and ensures that every child has access to the nutrition they need to thrive.

This bill is also a sound financial investment. By leveraging federal reimbursement programs like the National School Lunch Program and maximizing participation through the Community Eligibility Provision, North Dakota can significantly reduce the burden on state and local funds while ensuring broad access to meals. Additionally, this program will support schools in addressing food insecurity, which is a growing concern in both urban and rural communities.

The inclusive provisions of House Bill 1475 further underscore its importance. By requiring participating schools to meet federal and state nutritional standards and accommodate students with disabilities or medical needs, the bill ensures that all children, regardless of their circumstances, can benefit from these programs.

I urge the members of the House Education Committee to prioritize the health and future of our children by giving HB 1475 a Do Pass. Investing in free, healthy school meals is an investment in North Dakota's future—a future where every child has the opportunity to succeed.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the well-being of our students.

Sincerely,

Kara L. Geiger Mandan

#### Support for HB 1475

Dear Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee:

The North Dakota Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (NDAND) fully supports HB 1475, a vital initiative that ensures all children in North Dakota have access to nutritious meals, which are essential for their health, development, and academic success. This bill provides a crucial safety net by guaranteeing that every student receives healthy meals, addressing food insecurity and fostering better long-term health outcomes.

Proper nutrition is fundamental to children's physical and cognitive development, as well as their academic performance. For many students, school meals are the most balanced and nutritious meals they will consume each day. Universal access to these meals will encourage greater participation, ensuring that all students, regardless of income, receive the nourishment they need. By removing income-based eligibility requirements, HB 1475 reduces stigma and promotes a sense of community within schools, where all students share the same meal experience.

Food insecurity is a recognized risk factor for obesity and other chronic diseases. Addressing food insecurity in children will not only improve their immediate health and academic outcomes but will also help mitigate the future burden of chronic diseases, ultimately benefiting public health and reducing healthcare costs.

Furthermore, HB 1475 will provide critical support for the state's school nutrition professionals, who play an essential role in delivering safe, nutritious, and appealing meals. Expanding the program will create job opportunities within school nutrition services, which will contribute to local economies while ensuring schools can meet the growing demand for meal services.

We thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

The North Dakota Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

#### January 20th, 2025

Rising grocery prices are placing significant strain on North Dakota families, and the *School Meals for All* initiative offers a viable solution. This policy could save parents an estimated \$850 per child annually— over \$11,000 throughout a child's school years. These savings would empower families to allocate resources toward essentials like housing, healthcare, clothing, and extracurricular activities, reducing financial stress and expanding opportunities for their households.

This initiative isn't just about dollars; it's about ensuring every child in North Dakota has the tools they need to be successful. Nutritious school meals do more than fill stomachs; they provide stability for families facing food insecurity and help students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that students are not able to learn when they do not have their physiological needs met.

While federal nutrition programs provide some support, a large portion of North Dakota's food-insecure children don't qualify for assistance. That leaves countless families struggling to bridge the gap. Investing in *School Meals for All* is not only an investment in our children but also in our state's economy. When families have more disposable income, they can contribute more to their communities, strengthening local businesses and fostering economic growth.

I urge our legislature to prioritize the well-being of families and children by passing the *School Meals for All* initiative. The opportunity to give every child in North Dakota the foundation they need to succeed is in our hands.

Jessica Nolz Special Education Teacher Grand Forks, ND jnolz22@gmail.com Dear Committee Members and Chairman Heinert,

I am writing with a short story about the issue that lunch charges can cause for teachers. I am a retired teacher from Bismarck Public schools. At the beginning of each year more often than not I would have a couple of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch but the qualifying paper work was either not turned in or had not been processed for a week into the school year. So, every day I would have slips in my mailbox that were to be sent home with the children asking that the money owed be sent to school. Usually, I did this for a week or so and then I would pay the 2 or 3 days that hadn't been allowed because the filing hadn't been completed for those early school days. This wasn't a big burden to me as my husband had a job and we were not young and just starting out.

Please think of how this is a burden to not just the families but to the staff who have to keep the records, to the cafeteria personnel who had to remind students that they couldn't get certain items because they had a charge or were on free lunch and that item was an extra, and to the classroom teacher who cares for these children and doesn't want to see them singled out.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Marcia Patrie

District 47

Bismarck ND

# **Testimony in Support of House Bill 1475**

Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Robin Nelson, and I submit testimony on behalf of the Fargo Board of Education in strong support of House Bill 1475, which funds universal school meals for all North Dakota students alongside the National School Lunch Program.

Ensuring every student has access to nutritious meals is essential for learning and success. Hunger negatively affects concentration, memory, and classroom engagement. By providing meals to all students, we eliminate barriers to learning and create a supportive, inclusive school environment.

#### **Benefits of Universal School Meals:**

- Improved Academic Performance & Attendance Research shows that well-nourished students score higher on tests and are more engaged. The Food Research & Action Center found that universal school meals improve math and reading scores by 14%. A 2020 JAMA Pediatrics study found that schools with universal meals report higher attendance rates, especially among low-income students.
- 2. Eliminating Stigma & Reducing Stress School meal debt and eligibility requirements can isolate students. According to the Urban Institute, students in free or reduced-price meal programs often experience social stigma. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) found that universal meal programs increase student participation and reduce the embarrassment tied to meal assistance, fostering a sense of belonging.
- 3. **Supporting Families & Reducing Food Insecurity** Many working families do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals but still struggle to afford school meals. The **USDA** reports that **one in six North Dakota children** lives in a food-insecure household. Universal meals ensure all students receive the nutrition they need, allowing families to allocate resources to other essential needs.
- 4. **Long-Term Health Benefits** Consistent access to healthy meals reduces the risk of childhood obesity, diabetes, and other health conditions. The **American Academy of Pediatrics** states that children with stable access to nutritious meals have **lower rates of diet-related diseases** and better overall health. Investing in school meals fosters lifelong healthy habits and reduces future healthcare costs for families and the state.

While we recognize the financial implications of this bill, leveraging state and federal funding maximizes resources while ensuring no child goes hungry. Universal meals benefit students, families, schools, and communities.

I respectfully urge this committee to support House Bill 1475 and take a stand for the health, dignity, and success of North Dakota's children.

Respectfully, Robin Nelson, Fargo Board of Education Please VOTE YES DO PASS on HB1475, free school breakfast and lunch for all students in public, nonpublic, and tribal schools. This would end shaming of students who need vouchers to pay for meals and others who do not have money to pay for school meals and whose parents are unable to pay. Most importantly, this would assure that all students could eat healthy meals at breakfast and lunch and thereby be better able to pay attention, study, and learn in school—and have energy for recess and PE! Families at incomes well above the poverty level are struggling to find enough money to pay for groceries, vehicle operation, insurance, rent/mortgage, and other necessities. Free meals at school would reduce family grocery bills and help them better afford other key expenses. Help all of North Dakota's kids and families with children and vote yes on HB 1475. Sincerely, Susan Dingle, District 35, and a voter in every election

North Dakota 69th Legislative Assembly (2025-27) HB 1475

#### **Sponsors**

Introduced by Rep. Hatlestad, Sen. Cleary, Rep. Conmy, Rep. Hager, Rep. Holle, Rep. Ista, Rep. Jonas, Sen. Mathern, Rep. Novak, Rep. Schreiber-Beck

#### Title

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to providing breakfast and lunch to all students of participating entities, including school districts, nonpublic schools, and tribal schools, at no cost to the student.

Why is this even a debate? We have the funds. We have the resources. We have an ethical duty. Feed our youth. Feed our future.

Kevin R. Tengesdal Bismarck District 35

# Online Testimony in Favor of HB 1475 February 1, 2025

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Hunter Heck. As a private citizen, I am writing to you today in the hope that HB 1475 will not only pass through you, but into law with the stroke of the governor's pen in the future.

I currently work for Montpelier Public School as a Title I Paraprofessional where a lot of our students and their families would benefit greatly from this bill. This can truly be a "tax cut" for all North Dakotans. Families across this state have plenty of expenses they need to worry about such as transportation, healthcare, housing, clothing, education, etc. I have no doubt that parents want to put food on the table for their children. Yet, it can be difficult for some to get money for their children to get fed at school. There's a chance they try to get a second job to pay for their expenses. For others, they cut stuff out of their budget they need. So having this bill into law will give parents a huge weight off their shoulders.

No child, regardless of ZIP code, should starve at school. Our state produces some of the finest agricultural products in the world but can't help school children make sure they get decent meals? Well this bill will make a huge difference for the people of North Dakota.

I urge the passing of HB 1475.

Sincerely, Hunter Heck

#### **Testimony for HB 1475**

#### **House Education Committee**

#### **Greg Gallagher**

#### February 3, 2025

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Education Committee,

I am Greg Gallagher, a resident of Mandan, a member of the Mandan Health Coalition, and Vice-Chair of the Statewide Advocacy and Engagement Committee of the American Health Association in North Dakota. I provide this testimony as a private citizen and not as a lobbyist or representative for any other party. I testify in support of HB 1475 based on my understanding of this matter gained through my involvement with these and other organizations, and my over four-decades long career involving educational matters.

HB 1475 presents a long-overdue remedy to a persistent school readiness hurdle: how to provide nutritious meals to all students in our state's elementary and secondary schools as a component of their education, thereby affording them the best opportunity to learn and grow academically and socially to their fullest potential.

School Readiness implies addressing how we can best position students to be able to learn by meeting their basic needs. Securing access to good food and integrating nutritious meals into the school day goes a long way to improving school readiness for all students. It will reap significant rewards in learning and improved behavior.

Although federal programs offer some level of funding for low-income families, the specified eligibility levels have long been identified as too low, burdened by paperwork, or perceived as a source of shame for families. Students have been known to go without food rather than place themselves in a position of shame. Some schools attempt to help some students with a simple cheese sandwich--if they are aware or can. Some individuals may criticize providing school meals, observing that parents should have "skin in the game" by

providing for their children's lunches. Yet, it is the child who ultimately suffers the hunger, shame, and disregard of a system that appears all too indifferent to their experienced reality.

HB 1475 leverages federal and other funding to help offset state expenses and reimbursements are made only on actual meals served. Some parents may continue to prepare lunches and snacks for their children. Yet for many parents, school meals provided under HB 1475 will be received gratefully as a means to reduce their financial burden or other stressors.

School meal programs are widely popular with voters and the public. It has been my experience that when individuals are asked about providing school meals to students, many people express surprise that students are not already provided food as a component of education in our schools. The public supports the intent of HB 1475.

I ask that you vote to provide school meals to the children of our state. Please vote "Yes" in support of HB 1475.

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Thank you.

# Testimony of Deborah Roberts Educator, Solen Public School District #3 In Support of HB 1475 February 3, 2025

Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber-Beck and members of the House Education Committee:

My name Deborah Roberts and I have been an elementary school teacher in western North Dakota for 41 years. I have seen the positive impact free breakfasts and lunches can have on the students in the schools where I have taught.

For the past 27 years, I have taught on the Standing Rock Reservation and I currently serve at Title I teacher and librarian at Cannonball Elementary School. In my nearly three decades at Standing Rock I have seen first-hand the impact food insecurity has on student. For many, the meals they get at school will be the only meals they get every day. It is hard for a student to be concerned about reading, math, or writing when they are worried about when they will eat next.

I want to emphasize to you that this is NOT an issue unique to Native American schools and students. Prior to teaching in Fort Yates and Cannonball, I taught in a rural western North Dakota school where food insecurities were also prevalent, just not to the extent it is at my current school. Students often came to school hungry and the food we provided was likely the only nutritionals meals they received each day.

It is my hope, and the hope of teachers throughout North Dakota, that a state awash in money could see to the needs of its most vulnerable citizens, and the ones we are going to look to for the future success of this state.

Through no fault of their own, kids in schools may be going hungry. It's not their fault. They didn't ask to be in that situation. We, as educators, see it daily. And you, as legislators, have it in your power to do something truly positive to improve the lives of children – our next generation – in a life-changing way.

**Deborah Roberts** | Educator Solen-Cannonball School District Deb.Roberts@k12.nd.us In opposition to HB1475

Chairman and Committee members,

I come from a proud family of 5. My father worked hard to provide, for his family. My mother supplemented his income by taking on various part-time jobs to accommodate the schedules of 3 children. Although I wasn't aware at the time, I came from a low-middle class family who had parents that didn't believe in asking for or expecting anything without pulling up their boot straps and making it happen on their own. I learned a lot by that example.

It is unfortunate that some parents don't have the ambition or fortitude to complete the necessary paperwork to get assistance if they are in need. We cannot change who they are and only so much can be done for those who don't want to help themselves. The taxpayers of ND should not have to continue to support those parents who are irresponsible and lack the willingness to complete these readily available forms. The NDLSA has been very generous with supplying the needs of families with school age children. ND currently offers school breakfast and lunch programs which provide adequate meals at extremely low costs. \$3.25 for lunch and \$2.25 for breakfast / reduced at .40 and .50 respectively. These meals are much cheaper than what elderly pay on senior menus. I am not shaming families who truly need the free and reduced meals, but many parents, such as mine growing up; and ours now, acknowledge the responsibilities of providing for our families and we do that with pride.

In closing, if we start on this slippery slope, when will it end? Kids attending public schools are required to eat, dress, wear shoes, have good hygiene, transportation, etc... This will open the door for too many "expectations" paid for by other taxpayers, many of which do not have children and/or cannot afford to continue to pay the way for the children of others.

It's not too early to ask this generation to step-up, I just hope it's not too late either.

Respectfully, I ask for a Do Not Pass Vote on HB1475.

Connie Samuelson 226 Souris Drive Minot, ND 58701 Members of the House Education Committee,

I am Brenda Seehafer, an elementary Title I reading and math teacher from Rolla, ND. I am asking for your support on HB 1475, a Universal School Meals Bill.

As an educator, I know that hungry kids have a harder time in school. I also know that feeding all kids when they are at school just makes sense. Kids that are fed perform and learn better; I see this constantly. Universal School Meals would save families over \$1000 per child each year. We are in a time when many families are struggling with rising costs, and this relief would make a meaningful difference for working families. Supporting HB 1475 would then circulate more money into the local economy, which is so important in a rural state like North Dakota. This bill would also support learning outcomes for our students because they wouldn't have to worry about being hungry. Passing HB 1475 could lead to decreasing behaviors in our schools and decreasing hunger in our communities.

Please support HB 1475, as this is for our students. Help educators help our students by feeding all of our students, which in turn will lead to better learning.

I'm writing to show support for HB 1475. I grew up in a household with very limited income. My mother was a widow with 2 young children and her retail job barely covered our living expenses. We were lucky to occasionally get financial help from others in her family but mostly we were lucky to be able to afford food at home so when we were able to have free lunches in middle and high school, it was a huge help to our family. The only problem with it was that I and my brother had to use small yellow punchcards to "pay" for our lunches and all the other kids saw that. I was only teased by one person but my brother was less lucky and I couldn't help him defend himself since he was in different classes in a different part of the building. It would've been another great grace if we hadn't had to be so "marked" for harassment and abuse by these yellow cards or even standing out because others could see we got our lunches for free when they had to pay. Making this the norm for everyone will save a lot of misery for a lot of kids so I support HB 1475.

# Testimony of Landis Larson, ND AFL-CIO President In Support of HB 1475 February 3, 2025

#### Chairperson:

My name is Landis Larson, President of the North Dakota AFL-CIO. The North Dakota AFL-CIO is the federation of labor unions in North Dakota, representing the interests of all working people in our state.

I am testifying on behalf of the North Dakota AFL-CIO in support of House Bill 1475.

The North Dakota AFL-CIO and our affiliates resoundingly support universal preschool meals for a number of reasons:

Working families are feeling the strain of increased prices when it comes to food, childcare, housing transportation, and more. Free school meals would mean an extra \$850 per child per year that working families keep in pocket. That money gets spent locally here in North Dakota and is good for the local economy.

Even with good union jobs, working families can surely use a bit extra to make ends meet.

We understand that that business is experiencing a workforce shortage, and we believe that free school meals would make North Dakota more competitive in attracting workers with young families.

When we think of targeted relief for working families in North Dakota, there is no more efficient and accountable method than providing nutrition in the form of meals while children are at school. We know exactly where that relief is going and how it's helping.

The North Dakota AFL-CIO and our union affiliates have repeatedly, year after year, passed resolutions and motions of support at union meetings and state conventions in support of this issue.

We will continue to spend our time and resources talking about free school meals because it is such a common sense idea that our members deeply care about. It's also the right thing to do for our kids.

This is exactly the kind of bold economic relief that working families will appreciate for generations to come. We hope you can support a "Do Pass" on House Bill 1475 and be part of history in passing one of the most popular and meaningful bi-partisan bills in a generation.

# Support HB 1475

I am the North Dakota Legislative Director of the BMWED-IBT. We are a labor union that represents railroad workers who fix, build, and maintain our nation's railroads, bridges, and buildings. I am here today to urge the DO PASS of HB 1475 at committee and on the floor.

Our members are parents and community members; we have seen firsthand how vital school meals are for our kids. They're not just about filling bellies; they're about fueling minds. When children have access to nutritious meals, they're more focused, engaged, and ready to learn. It's hard to concentrate on math or reading when you're hungry, as we all know in our adult lives as well.

Not only is this a good bill for ethical reasons, but it is also good for the real-time tax cut it would provide hardworking North Dakota families. Families with children have the hardest time making ends meet month after month. While the legislature is dealing with their constituents upset by the burden of taxes, it has the great opportunity to provide that relief right away. This may seem like a lot of money, but all of it would be going straight to the accounts of taxpayers who put you here to make their lives better.

Some may view this as beneficial legislation; however, we argue that it is a moral obligation to provide meals for our most vulnerable citizens—our future leaders, our children. Let us demonstrate that this state is committed to the welfare of its citizens, rather than just offering subsidies to businesses.

Thank you for considering this important issue. We appreciate your time and dedication to our children's well-being. Please vote YES on HB 1475; my brothers and sisters - your constituents are watching.

Sincerely,

**Deven Mantz** 

ND Legislative Director BMWED-IBT

701-833-0182

Minot, ND District 5





February 3, 2025

Chairman Heinert and House Education Committee Members,

On June 4<sup>th</sup> of last year, your American Heart Association released a Presidential Advisory outlining a trajectory which is alarming, yet we can make transformational change if we start today.

At least 6 in 10 U.S. adults (61%), more than 184 million people, are expected to have some type of cardiovascular disease within the next 30 years, reflecting a disease prevalence that will have a \$1.8 trillion price tag in direct and indirect costs.

It is projected from 2020 to 2050,

- Obesity will increase from 43.1% to 60.6%, impacting more than 180 million people.
- People aged 20-64 years also will have the highest prevalence and highest growth for obesity, with more than 70 million young adults having a poor diet.

As you reflect on this, think about our 5-year-old children today. 25 years from now, they will be 30 years of age and could have the highest prevalence and highest growth of obesity. Let's not only think of today's impact, let's think of 25 years from now. The cost to feed children nutritious meals today is less than paying for medical bills 25 years from today.

This is concerning yet there can be optimism as together we can create an environment in which all North Dakotans can have nutritional security every day through various initiatives, good policy development and implementation, providing a worthy return on our investments.

Poor nutrition is a leading contributor to the development of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. Food insecurity, a household-level social or economic condition of limited access to sufficient food, contributes to disparities in chronic disease outcomes, especially cardiovascular diseases. While many US food policies and programs are designed to address food insecurity, there is a growing consensus that the focus should be broadened to include nutrition security.

Nutrition security is defined as having equitable and stable availability, access, affordability, and utilization of foods and beverages that promote well-being and prevent and treat disease. Shifting focus to nutrition security is critical for addressing socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in nutrition and chronic diseases.

In North Dakota, deaths by heart disease have risen from 2018 to 2022 by 12% and is the number 1 cause of death in North Dakotans. And, earlier this year the North Dakota Multi-Partner Health Collaborative (MPHC) was formed to help North Dakota become the healthiest state in the nation and nutrition is a critical conversation to achieving this aspirational vision.



As mentioned earlier, good policy development is one of those key levers to becoming the healthiest state in the nation and one of those policies would be implementing Healthy School Meals for All in North Dakota.

Beyond the fact we may not be able to afford the prospective cost of \$1.8 Trillion dollar bill by 2050 if we don't change our current behaviors, a systematic review of 47 studies, 25 in the United States and 22 conducted in other countries and developed economies, there are 7 reasons why Healthy School Meals for all is a good investment today:

- 1. Providing healthy school meals for all is associated with increases in the number of students participating in the school meal program.
- 2. Providing healthy school lunches for all is positively associated with better student diet quality, particularly in the presence of strong school nutrition standards that include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- 3. Providing healthy school meals for all improves food security among students and families with lower incomes.
- 4. Providing healthy school lunches for all is positively associated with students' academic performance.
- 5. Providing healthy school meals for all significantly improves student attendance among students from lower-income and food-insecure households
- 6. Healthy school meals for all with strong nutrition standards have been shown to not increase student **Body Mass Index**.
- 7. There is evidence in the U.S. that school food service budgets benefit from use of the community eligibility provision (CEP), an option that allows schools in high poverty areas to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students; In particular, schools with a high percentage of students from low-income households may benefit financially from CEP due to increased revenues from federal reimbursements of school meals served.

We ask you today to vote **YES on HB 1475** which is a worthy investment as one policy lever to help become the healthiest state in the Nation, once again.

With respect & sincerity,

Tony Burke, BA, CCMP

Government Relations Director, Regional Team Lead American Heart Association ND/SD/NE M 605.351.5939 I am writing in support of HB1475. I believe providing breakfast and lunch to our youth at school is a must. I grew up in a single parent home and was on the free lunch program in North Dakota. There were so many times that the most food I would get in a day came from my school that I couldnt even begin to count them. I now am an adult with children of my own. My husband and I work full time and still sometimes funds are tight. I know there are many across our state who feel this. Ensuring every child has a good breakfast and lunch helps ensure they are fed and ready to learn while at a school. I urge our representatives to see the benefits of this and pass this bill.

Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee, for the record, I am Jackson Harper, a member of the governance committee of the Red River Valley Democratic Socialists of America. Today I am writing to urge a *Do Pass* recommendation for HB 1475.

The bill before you is a splendid opportunity to improve the quality of life for the over 119,000 students enrolled in public education in our state. In passing this piece of legislation, you can guarantee that every pupil begins and ends each day of learning with a full belly. Twice per day, students will enjoy a nutritious meal regardless of their home situation—poverty, neglect, and other unfortunate circumstances will not dictate which child has a proper breakfast and lunch.

Public health research has found that universal school meal programs implemented elsewhere have benefited students. A 2021 paper by Cohen et al. published in the journal *Nutrients* reviewed 47 such prior studies and found that free lunch programs were positively correlated with "diet quality, food security, and academic performance". A smaller systematic <u>review</u> by Spill et al. published in 2024 likewise found an association between free lunch programs and decreased obesity and school suspensions, plus a potential increase in school attendance.

Beyond facts and figures, this bill allows us to fulfill our obligation to aid those who need it. Are we not called to feed the hungry, and is that call not more dire when the hungry are children, who depend on us adults for their wellbeing? Ultimately, I am not asking for you to place your trust in a newfangled pedagogical experiment. No, I am asking that you support a proposal that rests on the common-sense premise that our children are happier and better off if they have a decent midday meal.

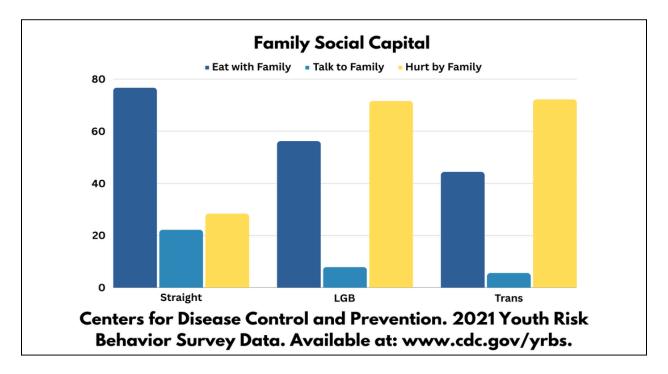
I thank you all for taking the time to read this testimony, and I hope it persuades you to render a **Do Pass** recommendation for HB 1475.

# House EducationCommittee Feb 4th, 2025 HB 1475 Testimony in Support

Dear Chair Heinert and the members of the House Education Committee,

I urge a "Do Pass" on HB 1475.

When looking at data from the 2021 YRBS, we find that for many youths, they do not eat with their families, talk to their families when they're having a problem, and also report experiencing harm from their families. While there are many loving parents and families across our state, there are some where kids are starving and suffering.



How does a kid concentrate in school when they're hungry? How does a kid have hope or avoid depression when they don't know where they'll eat? If we're taking upstream prevention I can hardly think of a better investment than feeding kids, because without this, they very much don't have the basic necessities of life or a decent shot at it.

I know in the past we have talked about parental responsibility on these bills or leveraged this as a quasi tax break to help families reduce the cost of raising kids. And I think any armchair philosophy about this subject is an exercise in pointlessness if we're not solving hunger for kids in our state. Parents should be responsible, families should have support, but if kids are starving then I'm not sure I care about any of that. The only thing that matters in this conversation is the kids and they deserve to eat no matter the circumstances of their home.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state, Faye Seidler



#### 1 Testimony in Support of HB 1475 - NDCEL

- 2 Chairperson and Members of the Committee, I stand before you today in strong support of
- 3 House Bill 1475, which seeks to provide healthy school meals for all students at no cost. This
- 4 legislation is **not just an investment in meals—it is an investment in student success**,
- 5 economic stability, and North Dakota's constitutional responsibility to provide a high-
- 6 quality education for all.

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#### 7 I. The Impact of Hunger on Student Learning

- 8 Students cannot learn when they are hungry. Numerous studies confirm that food insecurity
- 9 negatively affects cognitive development, academic performance, and classroom behavior.
  - Academic Success: Research from the National Bureau of Economic Research and the American Psychological Association consistently shows that students who have access to consistent, nutritious meals score higher on standardized tests, have better attendance, and demonstrate improved focus and classroom behavior.
  - Chronic Absenteeism & Behavior Issues: Schools that provide free meals report a decrease in disciplinary actions and higher student engagement. Hunger leads to irritability, lack of concentration, and increased health issues, which directly impact student performance.
  - Long-Term Economic Benefits: Feeding students is not a short-term welfare measure—
    it is an economic investment. Studies indicate that for every dollar invested in school
    meal programs, the economy sees a return of up to \$2.50 in future earnings due to
    improved education outcomes and workforce readiness.
- 22 By ensuring every child in North Dakota has consistent access to healthy meals, we are
- 23 providing a fundamental tool for academic achievement and future workforce development.
- 24 II. Fiscal Responsibility: A Sound and Constitutional Investment
- 25 The proposed \$140 million investment in this bill is comparable to the cost associated with
- 26 Education Savings Accounts (ESA) proposals, yet it avoids the constitutional vulnerabilities
- 27 that ESA programs face.
- 28 A. The Constitutional Issues with ESA Programs
- 29 Recent legal decisions, including in South Carolina, Kentucky, and Arizona, have struck
- 30 down ESA programs due to constitutional conflicts related to public funding for private and
- 31 religious schools. North Dakota's Constitution (Article X, Section 18) explicitly prohibits
- 32 public funds from directly or indirectly supporting sectarian schools.



- ESA funds inevitably flow into private and religious institutions, making them legally 1 vulnerable under North Dakota's strict constitutional provisions against public dollars 2 3 funding private education.
  - ESA programs in other states have been blocked or significantly altered due to funding loopholes, lack of accountability, and concerns over misallocation of taxpayer dollars.
- 7 By contrast, HB 1475 is legally sound, aligns with North Dakota's constitutional duty to
- fund public education, and directly benefits every student without legal risk. 8
- **B. Ensuring Public Funds Serve Public Interests** 9
- 10 The primary role of the state budget should be to support a high-quality public education system. 11
  - HB 1475 ensures that state dollars directly enhance student success, providing immediate benefits without the risk of costly legal battles.
- Rather than diverting public funds to private institutions, which creates inequities, 14 this bill strengthens North Dakota's commitment to providing an equitable, effective, and constitutionally sound public education system.
- III. Addressing Misinformation About "Universal Free Meals" 17
- Some may argue that parents should be responsible for their child's meals, but our schools 18 19 already serve as critical nutrition providers for thousands of North Dakota families.
  - More than 1 in 6 children in North Dakota face food insecurity—meaning they regularly experience hunger due to financial hardship.
    - Many working-class families earn just above the threshold for free and reduced-price meals but still struggle to afford consistent, nutritious food.
    - Providing universal free meals removes the stigma for children receiving free lunches and eliminates administrative burdens on school districts, ensuring no child falls through the cracks.
    - This bill provides as much support for a family's budget as does ESA's in a way that we can all stand together and support and nobody is arguing, fighting, taking people to court, or damaging relationships in a time when we need to stand together for our kids.
- This legislation allows all students, regardless of family income, to focus on learning rather 30
- than hunger. 31

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- IV. Conclusion: Prioritizing Students Over Legal Battles 32
- 33 House Bill 1475 offers a clear, effective, and constitutional approach to ensuring every child
- in North Dakota receives the nutrition they need to thrive academically. 34



- By passing this bill, the legislature chooses to invest in proven student success strategies
- 2 rather than risky, legally questionable ESA programs.
- 3 North Dakota has the **financial capacity** to do this, and **our children deserve nothing less.**
- 4 Let's make sure that every student in every school has the foundation they need to succeed.
- 5 I respectfully urge this committee to support House Bill 1475 and ensure that no child in
- 6 North Dakota goes hungry while trying to learn.
- 7 Thank you. I welcome any questions.



1224 West Owens Avenue Bismarck ND 58501 1-800-932-8791 • (701)255-4127 www.ndsba.org

# HB 1475 Testimony of Amy De Kok House Education Committee February 3, 2025

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Amy De Kok, and I serve as the executive director for the North Dakota School Boards Association. I am here to express our support of HB 1475, which seeks to provide universal free school breakfast and lunch for all students in participating schools across North Dakota. This legislation represents a critical investment in the well-being, academic success, and long-term health of our children, ensuring that no student goes hungry while at school.

Numerous studies confirm that students who have consistent access to nutritious meals perform better academically, experience improved cognitive function and demonstrate better classroom behavior. HB 1475 would remove the stigma associated with free and reduced-price meal programs, ensuring that every child, regardless of their family's economic status, receives the nourishment they need to thrive.

Food insecurity remains a persistent challenge for many families, and the cost of school meals can place undue stress on those struggling to make ends meet. While existing federal programs provide some relief, they do not reach all students in need, and the burdens of paperwork and qualification thresholds often exclude families experiencing financial hardship. By fully funding school meals for all students, this legislation would create a more equitable and inclusive educational environment.

Some have argued that education funding should be directed toward expanding school choice through the establishment of public charter schools and education savings accounts (ESAs) instead. While school choice initiatives may benefit a select group of students, they divert critical public resources away from neighborhood schools, often leaving traditional public school students with fewer resources and opportunities. By contrast, universal free school meals benefit every child in every school district, strengthening the public education system as a whole. The \$140 million appropriation in this bill represents a direct investment in student well-being and success, whereas establishing charter schools and ESAs can lead to increased educational inequality and financial strain on public schools.

North Dakota has a responsibility to prioritize policies that benefit the largest number of students and ensuring that every child has access to nutritious meals is one of the most effective ways to support their academic growth and overall development. The benefits of this program—improved educational outcomes, reduced absenteeism, and better health—far outweigh the costs.

HB 1475 is a commonsense, research-backed policy that will ensure that all students have the nutrition they need to succeed. It is a more direct and impactful way to support student learning than diverting funds to school privatization efforts. I urge this committee to issue a DO PASS recommendation on HB 1475 and reaffirm North Dakota's commitment to high-quality public education for all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

- 1 HB 1475 -House Education Committee By: Joan Knoll, Licensed Registered
- 2 Dietitian for the Child Nutrition Program at Bismarck Public School District,
- 3 Member of the School Nutrition Association.
- 4 Chairman Heinert and Member of the Committee:
- 5 My name is Joan Knoll, and I have been a Registered Dietitian in the Child Nutrition
- 6 Program for Bismarck Public Schools for the past fifteen years. I am here today,
- 7 providing testimony in favor of HB 1475.
- 8 I have a unique viewpoint regarding our students' nutrition at BPS. I have been
- 9 teaching nutrition in all schools, including the elementary, middle, and high schools,
- for fifteen years. I have taught approximately 15,000 students in 1200 classrooms
- 11 throughout that time.
- One topic I teach in EVERY presentation is the importance of breakfast. I
- consistently ask students, "Raise your hands if you did NOT eat breakfast today?".
- I observed that about 30-50 % of students would raise their hands no matter the
- socioeconomics of the school. Many of our students are not eating a balanced
- breakfast at home for many reasons (i.e. time, working parents, early bus times, food
- availability, etc). After BPS began offering free breakfasts to students in our six
- 18 CEP schools, I noted the classes I taught in the mornings were calmer, more alert,
- and more engaged. It was the same when we had free breakfasts and lunches
- following the COVID years. Once we implemented our breakfast carts at two of our
- 21 middle schools, I, noted the same for them as well. My son was a student at Simle
- 22 Middle School when we began the pilot program of our "Second Chance Breakfast
- 23 Cart" during home base time. I remember as a working, busy parent being relieved
- that he could eat from the breakfast cart at school if he was running late or if it was

a stressful morning (which is most mornings with a family going in different directions). Eating breakfast closer to learning time nourishes students' brains which improves their concentration, energy, and attentiveness in the classroom which ultimately contributes to better learning. For teachers, students who are fueled well and prepared to learn are easier to teach which makes classrooms easier to manage.

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Another main topic in my presentation is school lunches. I focus on the MyPlate, which is a visual of the five food groups, to teach them about balance in meal planning. School lunch is an ideal example with research indicating that school lunch tends to be more nutritionally balanced compared to packed lunches brought from home. From my thousands of interactions with students, it appears that our lunches offer a greater variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and nutrient-rich calcium and protein sources than they may have at home. For example, a student could take up to at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables between breakfast and lunch. It is difficult for many parents to provide that amount of variety of nutritious food choices at home. Every day, our students are consistently offered good dairy and protein choices, a fresh vegetable and fruit bar, whole grain-rich foods, and legumes, i.e. black beans, edamame, baked beans, and chili with beans. In addition, I have observed that many students have not had some of the food items that are offered on our menus. It is important for children and teens to be exposed to a variety of healthy food choices regularly to help them form healthy habits into their adulthood.

In conclusion, by giving a "do-pass" for healthy school meals for all is an investment in the health and well-being of our children. This initiative is a win for our students and their families and for the teachers that devote their lives to teaching our students.

- On behalf of Bismarck Public Schools and the North Dakota School Nutrition
- 2 Association I urge you to support HB 1475.

- 1 HB 1475 –House Education Committee By: Michelle Wagner, RD, SNS, Child
- 2 Nutrition Program Director Bismarck Public School District, Legislative Chair
- 3 North Dakota School Nutrition Association
- 4 Chairman Heinert and Member of the Committee:
- 5 My name is Michelle Wagner, and I am the Child Nutrition Program Director for
- 6 Bismarck Public Schools and the Legislative Chair for the North Dakota School
- 7 Nutrition Association. As a registered dietitian I have worked in school nutrition for
- 8 the past thirteen years. I am here today, providing testimony in favor of HB 1475.
- 9 You're likely to hear testimony about how this bill will benefit North Dakota
- 10 families, reduce stigma for students who rely on school meals, and address the
- fundamental truth that a hungry child cannot learn. Let me begin by saying that I
- wholeheartedly agree with all these points. However, rather than reiterate them, I'd
- like to offer a different perspective. Today, I want to focus on some of the economic
- benefits this bill will bring to our local communities if healthy meals for all is
- implemented.
- Let's start with milk. Recently, HB 1132 was passed with the primary goal to
- increase the quantity of milk purchased by schools. However, evidence suggests that
- providing breakfast and lunch at no charge leads to a natural increase in milk sales
- for our local farmers. During the 2023-2024 school year, Bismarck Public Schools
- 20 purchased 1.3 million cartons of milk and served slighty over 2 million meals. Based
- on this information, approximately two-thirds of students selected milk with their
- meals, which aligns with the National Dairy Council's finding that 65% of students
- 23 nationwide choose milk with school meals.

- 1 Using this trend and factoring in projected participation increases across the state of
- 2 20% at breakfast and 15% at lunch, we estimate that an **additional 4,225 cartons of**
- milk could be taken daily at breakfast and an additional 8,000 cartons of milk
- 4 could be selected daily at lunch. Altogether, this could result in North Dakota school
- 5 districts purchasing an **additional 2.1 million cartons** of milk annually.
- Now, let's consider the impact on jobs. School meal programs operate based on a
- 7 "meals per labor hour" model. In simple terms, the more meals served, the more
- 8 labor hours are required, which leads to additional job opportunities. Conversely,
- 9 when meal participation declines, hours and jobs are often reduced.
- With an anticipated 20% increase in breakfast and a 15% increase in lunch, this
- would directly translate into more job opportunities within our communities. While
- some districts might be concerned about the challenge of finding additional staff,
- from an economic perspective, creating more jobs is undeniably beneficial for the
- 14 local economy.
- My third and final point is the additional federal revenue provided through the U.S.
- 16 Agricultural Commodities program. For every reimbursable meal served, school
- nutrition programs receive \$0.45 in entitlement funds, which are allocated to
- purchase U.S. agricultural products. In the 2023–2024 school year, North Dakota
- received \$6.7 million in federal entitlement funds. These funds support the
- 20 procurement of items such as beef, chicken, potatoes, cheese, fruits, and vegetables.
- Based on projected increases in meal participation, North Dakota could receive an
- 22 additional one million dollars in entitlement funds. This increase would directly
- benefit not only North Dakota farmers but also agricultural producers across the
- country, further strengthening our agricultural economy.

- 1 In conclusion, supporting healthy school meals for all invests in our children,
- 2 communities, and local economy, creating jobs and boosting demand for local
- 3 agriculture. On behalf of Bismarck Public Schools and the North Dakota School
- 4 Nutrition Association, I urge you to support HB 1475 for a healthier, stronger future
- 5 for North Dakota.



Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

As the state's largest hunger-relief organization and its only food bank, the Great Plains Food Bank supports House Bill 1475 and encourages the committee to recommend a "do-pass" on HB1475 to provide free school meals to children across North Dakota. With this bill, we have an opportunity to take impactful steps toward ending childhood hunger across our state.

We believe that when you feed a child, you feed the future. Last year, more than 54,000 North Dakota children (1 in 3 children) were served through the Great Plains Food Bank and our network of charitable hunger relief programs. Our trio of childhood hunger-relief programs – backpack program, school panty program and youth summer meals program – along with our network of 200 partner food pantries across the state are feeding kids every day while they are home. But this does nothing to feed them while they are in school when they are trying to learn and to grow.

Daily we hear from teachers, administrators, and counselors that hunger among school-aged children continues to be an issue. We, at the Great Plains Food Bank have a responsibility to keep our children fed, but we can't do it alone. The only way we will eradicate childhood hunger is, together, with public, private, and nonprofit entities working alongside each other.

Thank you for your consideration and support of HB1475.

Melissa Sobolik CEO





**Great Public Schools** 

Great Public Service

#### Testimony Before the House Education Committee HB 1475 Monday, February 3, 2025

Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, I am Nick Archuleta, North Dakota United president, and I am happy to appear before you today to urge a *do pass* recommendation for HB 1475.

Mr. Chair, I will be very brief in my testimony. I just want to point out that HB 1475 is one of those rare pieces of proposed legislation that makes so much sense, it is hard to believe that it is not already the law. I will boil it down to this: we do not charge families for their children to use district owned Chromebooks, iPads, textbooks, computer labs, or to participate in field experiences. Why? Because we realize that these are important educational components which are vital to ensuring meaningful educational experiences for our students.

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, the same is true of nutritious and satisfying school meals. Given that we have a compulsory attendance law in North Dakota, isn't it logical that we provide nutritional meals while these children are in our charge? At ND United, we believe that the state that mandates attendance should also cover the cost of school lunches for all children.

Additionally, there may be no simpler idea proposed by this Legislature to put hard-earned dollars back into working families' pockets than HB 1475. This bill, if passed, will be an investment not only in our children's academic success, but also in thousands of working families across the state.

With that, Mr. Chair, I conclude my remarks and urge *a do* pass recommendation for HB 1475.

HB 1475

House Education

Chairman Heinert and Committee Members

I urge a Do Not Pass on HB 1475. It is very burdensome for taxpayers and schools. Many advocates underestimate the sheer cost of providing free school meals to all students regardless of family income. Reduced responsibility and appreciation. Reasonable concerns exist around how universal free meals could diminish students' responsibility and appreciation. This is the responsibility of the parents to provide meals for their children along with providing clothing and shelter. Mandated school lunches for every student could limit dietary choice and flexibility. This would cost the taxpayer \$140,000,000. Plus, 40% of our property tax dollars that fund the schools and 82% of our tax dollars that the state allocates to the public schools. It is time for Parents to be responsible for the upbringing of their children. It is Not the role of government. Most citizens of North Dakota cannot afford any more taxes.

Thank You, Gordon Greenstein



## **Great Plains Housing Authority**

Serving Dickey, Eddy, Foster, Logan, Sargent, Stutsman, and Wells Counties

To: ND Legislators

From: David Klein, Great Plains Housing Authority

Date: February 3, 2025

Re: HB 1475

Great Plains Housing Authority supports HB 1475 relating to providing breakfast and lunch to all students of participating entities, including school districts, nonpublic schools, and tribal schools, at no cost to the student.

GPHA serves seven counties - Dickey, Eddy, Foster, Logan, Sargent, Stutsman, and Wells — with HUD rental assistance and housing expertise. Our agency sees the impact lunch costs can have on low-income households, and the needs for children to have decent meals. Food insecurity is enormous.

In addition, GPHA collaborates closely with schools and see their lunch debt eat away at regular budgets that could fund repairs or other staffing needs. All income ranges do not regularly pay the meal tab and that causes issues for the school system.

Food insecurity is an enormous problem in rural areas. The availability and cost of fresh produce, meat, dairy, and other food products is hard. Incomes and food assistance (SNAP) do not cover all costs for school age households.

HB1475 is a crucial step in reducing food insecurity and INVESTING in our youth to have good health, minds, and pride in their schools.

Mailing address: 300 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave NE – Suite 200, Jamestown, ND 58401

Toll free: 800-340-4537 Web: www.greatplainsha.com Phone: 701-252-1098 Email: office@greatplainsha.com

Fax: 701-252-7735 Locations: Carrington, Ellendale, Jamestown, New Rockford



All students need, at a minimum, access to nutritious foods in order have a chance at improving their physical and mental health, and allow them to learn!

Students who eat breakfast at school have better attendance rates, fewer missed school days, and better test scores!

All students need, at a minimum, access to nutritious foods in order have a chance at improving their physical and mental health, and allow them to learn!

Students who eat breakfast at school have better attendance rates, fewer missed school days, and better test scores!

#### House Education Committee February 3, 2025 - HB 1475 Testimony in Favor

Committee Chair Heinert and members of the Education committee,

I am writing **in support of HB 1475**. If passed, this bill would improve food security for children through expanded access to school meals. Research, including findings from the Food Research & Action Center, highlights the significant benefits of consistent, nutritious meals for children's academic and behavioral outcomes.

Hunger and food insecurity negatively impact children's ability to concentrate, regulate emotions, and perform academically. The research underscores that students who start their day with a healthy breakfast show improved memory, increased attention spans, and fewer behavioral and disciplinary issues. Ensuring that all children have reliable access to school meals fosters not only their well-being but also a stronger, more productive learning environment.

In fact, by reducing these negative impacts for students, there would be a positive ripple effect on the well-being of others—teachers, parents, and so on. **By supporting HB 1475**, we invest in the future of our communities, reducing long-term social and economic costs associated with food insecurity and adverse childhood experiences.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Schafer Fargo

Chairman Heinert and members of the house education committee,

I am a parent with children enrolled in public school in North Dakota. For all of the reasons that many others have so eloquently stated in their testimony in favor of this bill, I urge you to support the families of this state by providing universal free school breakfast and lunch. It is a no-brainer that when kids are fed they are better prepared to learn. Please do the right thing and support HB 1475!

Sincerely, LaRissa Wiley, Montpelier ND I am in favor of free school lunches. This will benefit kids of all ages and social classes.

701.557.1500 » info.naswnd@socialworkers.org » naswnd.socialworkers.org



## Testimony on HB 1475 North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers 3 February, 2025 House Education Committee

Chair Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee:

The North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers requests that the Committee give a **Do Pass recommendation** on HB 1475, a bill which will provide breakfast and lunch to all students in public schools, nonpublic schools, and tribal schools, at no cost to the student.

There is a significant body of research which shows that students who receive free school meals:

- are less likely to have nutrient inadequacies and are more likely to consume fruits, vegetables, and milk at breakfast and lunch
- have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and academic achievement as well as decreased tardiness
- are less likely to experience stigma in the cafeteria
- are hunger free and have the nutrition they need throughout the day to learn.

Social workers are invested in promoting the general welfare of families and communities, and advocate for living conditions which are conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs. North Dakota social workers are proud to be working in a state in which there is bipartisan support for a bill which will further the well-being of our state's children.

Thank you for your review of our testimony, and we respectfully request that you give HB 1475 a Do Pass recommendation.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Loos Lobbyist, #342 North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. I am writing in support of providing breakfast and lunch to all students.

I have a kindergartner and first grader in public school in Jamestown, North Dakota. I, like so many other parents, have seen firsthand how hunger affects my children. They go from attentive and respectful to distracted and easily irritable within a short span of time. And that's just two kids—imagine multiplying the challenge of regulating emotions when hungry to a whole classroom of children. It's not possible. And it's not fair to the kids in our school whose families cannot afford snacks and meals.

Because there are no free lunch or snack options at our school, our teachers reach out to parents and ask for food donations to support their classroom. We are a title 1 school. Budgets are already tight for so many families. Imagine the burden that would be relieved for both teachers and parents if they knew their kids were fed. Imagine the capabilities of our children—how much more they could learn, show respect, and engage with their peers—if their hunger was not controlling their emotions and behaviors.

You have the opportunity today to not simply imagine a future where our kids are not hungry. You can actually make it happen. Please support this bill.

I support HB1475 because I've been a child of a single mother who struggled to put food on the table. I personally know countless families with children who struggle to make ends meet every day. North Dakotans overwhelmingly support free school lunches, that is a fact. Keep in mind, we are your constituents. A child who goes hungry is not in the right frame of mind to learn and be present in their school day. I can see no reason for this bill to not be passed. You all claim to care about children, now is your time to truly prove it.

# The Case for Free Student Meals in North Dakota

Enhancing Academic and Competitive Edge

#### Introduction

Providing free meals to students is a powerful initiative that North Dakota should seriously consider. Beyond addressing basic nutritional needs, free meals can significantly impact students' academic performance and overall competitiveness. This essay explores how implementing free meal programs in schools can enhance student outcomes and foster a more competitive future workforce for the state of North Dakota.

#### **Boosting Academic Performance**

Numerous studies have shown a strong correlation between proper nutrition and academic success. When students have access to consistent, balanced meals, they are better equipped to concentrate, engage in learning activities, and perform well academically. A study published in the "Journal of School Health" found that students who eat breakfast regularly have higher grades and score better on standardized tests compared to those who skip breakfast. By providing free meals, North Dakota can ensure that all students start their day with the necessary fuel for optimal cognitive function.

#### Improved Concentration and Cognitive Function

Hunger can be a significant distraction in the classroom, leading to decreased concentration and lower academic performance. According to the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, children who experience food insecurity are more likely to have difficulty focusing, which can hinder their ability to absorb and retain information. Free meals eliminate this barrier, allowing students to concentrate better and participate more actively in their lessons.

#### Enhanced Attendance and Reduced Absenteeism

Free meal programs can also contribute to higher attendance rates. The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) reports that students who participate in school meal programs have better attendance records. When students know they will receive a nutritious meal at school, they are more likely to attend regularly. This consistency is crucial for maintaining academic progress and ensuring students do not fall behind.

#### Fostering a Competitive Edge

In addition to improving academic performance, free meals can play a vital role in preparing students for future competitiveness in the workforce. By fostering an environment where students are well-nourished and ready to learn, North Dakota can cultivate a generation of individuals who are better prepared to meet the demands of a competitive global economy.

#### Promoting Healthy Lifestyle Habits

Providing free, nutritious meals at school can help instill healthy eating habits in students from a young age. When children are exposed to balanced diets that include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, they are more likely to adopt these habits into adulthood. A report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) highlights that healthy eating patterns established in childhood can lead to improved health outcomes and reduced healthcare costs in the future. By promoting healthy lifestyle habits, North Dakota can contribute to a more robust and productive workforce.

#### Reducing Long-Term Healthcare Costs

Investing in free school meals can lead to substantial long-term savings in healthcare costs. Poor nutrition is a leading factor in the development of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. By ensuring that students have access to nutritious meals, North Dakota can help prevent these conditions and reduce the financial burden on the state's healthcare system. The Journal of Adolescent Health found that students who participate in school meal programs are less likely to be overweight or obese, which translates to lower healthcare expenses down the line.

#### Supporting Economic Growth

A well-nourished student body is more likely to succeed academically, graduate, and pursue higher education or enter the workforce with strong skills and knowledge. This, in turn, supports the economic growth of North Dakota. According to the Economic Research Service of the USDA, investing in school meal programs can boost local economies by creating jobs and stimulating agricultural production. Providing free meals not only benefits individual students but also contributes to the overall economic prosperity of the state.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, North Dakota has a strategic opportunity to enhance the academic performance and competitiveness of its students by providing free meals in schools. The benefits extend beyond immediate nutritional needs, impacting concentration, attendance, and long-term

health. By fostering healthy lifestyle habits and supporting academic success, free meal programs can help cultivate a future workforce that is better equipped to meet the demands of a competitive global economy. Investing in free meals for students is an investment in the future prosperity and growth of North Dakota.

Hello,

As a parent of a student I feel that school meals should be funded through the legacy fund. I feel that if children are our legacy then why are we not using those funds for school meals. Many school age kids only meal a day comes from school meals. So if their parents can't afford to make the payment to eat at school they are starving and that affects their ability to learn better. So please pass this bill and help our legacy grow.

Hello,

As a parent of a student I feel that school meals should be funded through the legacy fund. I feel that if children are our legacy then why are we not using those funds for school meals. Many school age kids only meal a day comes from school meals. So if their parents can't afford to make the payment to eat at school they are starving and that affects their ability to learn better. So please pass this bill and help our legacy grow.



1 in 3 students is accessing food pantries for meals. Accessible school meals are shown to improve test scores and attendance. Your constituents overwhelmingly want free school meals for kids. If we care so much for life here, why are we not caring for our food insecure kids? I am firmly asking our ND reps to put their money where their mouth is.

#### TESTIMONY ON HB 1475 HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**February 3, 2025** 

By: Lynelle Johnson, Director of Child Nutrition and Food Distribution Programs 701-328-4565

**North Dakota Department of Public Instruction** 

Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lynelle Johnson and I am the Director of Child Nutrition and Food Distribution Programs with the Department of Public Instruction. I am here to provide information regarding HB 1475.

The National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs are federally administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and implemented at the state level by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. These programs aim to ensure that students receive nutritious meals that support their health and academic success. As part of our role in administering USDA Child Nutrition and Food Distribution Programs, our office is responsible for ensuring that schools meet the guidelines through administrative reviews, training, and technical assistance.

In North Dakota, 168 public and 25 non-public school districts, with an enrollment of approximately 125,500 students, participate in the National School Lunch Program, with the majority also offering the School Breakfast Program.

Participating schools must serve meals that meet the federal meal pattern requirements to receive reimbursements and USDA Foods. Schools must offer

meals to all enrolled students, and must collect household applications for students to receive meals at a free or reduced price.

Students qualify for free or reduced-price meals in two ways:

- 1. Income-Based Eligibility Families submit a meal application, and eligibility is determined by household income and size:
  - Free Eligibility: Household income at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
  - Reduced-Price Eligibility: Household income between 130% and 185% of the FPL.
  - State 200 Eligibility: Household income between 185% and 200% of the FPL.
- 2. Categorical Eligibility Students are automatically eligible for free meals if they participate in federal assistance programs such as SNAP, TANF,

Medicaid, identified as homeless, migrant, runaway, or in foster care.

Currently, in North Dakota, 31,798 students qualify for free meals, 7,680 qualify for reduced-price meals, and 1,786 qualify for the State 200 expanded eligibility.

If meals were provided at no cost to students, North Dakota would maximize federal reimbursements while covering the remaining costs at the state level. One available option to maximize federal reimbursements is the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows higher-poverty schools to offer free meals to all students without collecting household applications. Currently, schools qualify if at

least 25% of enrolled students are directly certified through federal programs such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid or if they are identified as homeless, migrant, or in foster care. Schools that participate in CEP receive reimbursement based on their Identified Student Percentage (ISP), which is multiplied by 1.6 to determine the percentage of meals reimbursed at the federal free rate (\$4.52 per lunch). The remaining meals are reimbursed at the paid rate (\$.51). Schools must recertify eligibility every four years and do not need to accept free and reduced meal applications during that time. Currently, 41 sites in North Dakota participate in the Community Eligibility Provision. An additional 50-60 sites that are eligible are not currently participating. Schools that do not qualify for the Community Eligibility Provision would continue to collect free and reduced-price applications from households and claim meals based on eligibility category to ensure compliance with federal reimbursement structures.

The state's reimbursement calculation would be based on the federal reimbursement rates, which USDA updates annually in July. Below is a breakdown of the reimbursement structure.

	Federal Portion	State Portion
Free Breakfast	\$2.37	\$0.00
Free Lunch	\$4.52	\$0.00
Reduced Breakfast	\$2.07	\$0.30
Reduced Lunch	\$4.12	\$0.40
Full Priced Breakfast	\$0.39	\$1.98
Full Priced Lunch	\$0.51	\$4.01

The estimated \$140 million biennium state cost was calculated by maximizing the Community Eligibility Provision and estimating future participation rates and reimbursement rates. For context, in the 2023-2024 school year, North Dakota schools collected approximately \$35 million in federal reimbursements for meal programs.

During the 2021-2022 school year, when all students received meals at no charge, participation was higher than normal. Breakfast participation averaged 38,500 meals per day. This school year, the average is 32,000 meals per day. Lunch participation averaged 86,000 meals per day in 2021-2022. This year, the average number is 82,000 meals per day.

Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee that concludes my prepared testimony. I will answer any questions that you may have.

HB 1475

Dear Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee:

This bill aligns with what is called doing the right thing. Children need to eat. Period. We are willing to pay for schools to educate our children, as we consider our children an investment for the future. Our investment comes short when we expect our children to attempt to try their best at something with an empty stomach.

Others have suggested that this bill further covers for parents that may be too lazy to fill out applications for assistance, and we shouldn't continue to conceal their laziness. This bill has nothing to with parents or parenting. This is children. We aren't paying to feed the parents. We are paying to feed kids. No one should have ill feelings or ill will towards kids. They are **KIDS!** 

Furthermore, we are assuming that the people that don't a pay their school lunch account are only those impoverished. I pay for my children's school lunch, but I would rather it not be something I have to monitor. My children can also go to the ala carte menu and charge a ridiculous amount of money right now to feed his friends and himself extra food. Right now, I cannot say to the school, "I only want my son to buy healthy food that is regularly served and not 8 bags of chips and 4 cookies."

So, we don't pay our child's school lunch bill except for at the end of the school year because that is the only way that he cannot run up the account to extraordinary amounts. I can see you roll your eyes are perhaps my parenting, saying I could discipline my son better, maybe. He is also 12 and his prefrontal cortex is still developing so he is irrational at times, usually when he's hungry. He also is easy to influence from his peers if it means they will approve of him.

If school lunches were free, he wouldn't be able to add the extra food on to our tab when he so desires for him or his friends. For him to get extra food, he would have to get us to put money on our account.

Us, and others, not paying our school lunch fee isn't right for the school and is an administrative waste that could be going to some thing else better serving the school and our community.

I urge you to DO PASS HB1475 and continue to show our kids that we want them to excel in school as a whole, all kids, not just my kids, not just your kids, all of the kids.

Abby Lange	

Thank you.

Fargo, ND

February 03, 2025

Dear Chairperson and members of the Committee,

My name is Cheyene Campbell and I live in Fargo, ND. I'm writing to express my support for HB 1475.

My husband and I don't have children but we both fully support free lunches for all students regardless of income. A student spends a full day at school. Our publicly funded schools should ensure that those students are taken care of while away from home. That includes ensuring they are fed. Breakfast and lunch should be provided free of charge for all students regardless of income. A hungry student is a distracted student.

Many opponents of this bill will say that it is the responsibility of parents to ensure their kid has food. Unfortunately, things don't happen the way they should. Some parents can't afford to pay the lunch bill. Some forget to pay it. Some can afford to pay it but just don't care. There are too many variables in which children are subjected to the possibility of having no food for an entire day. In a wealthy state in a wealthy country, there is no reason to deny free breakfasts and lunches to students.

I remember vividly the shame I felt when I was turned away from lunch services for having a negative balance in my lunch account. My friends offered parts of their lunches to me so I'd have something to eat. Do we want to put the onus of feeding children on the charity of other children, when we adults should be the ones protecting them? Do we want children to be shamed over something they have no control over? I don't think we do.

Please approve HB 1475.

Respectfully,

Cheyene Campbell

Fargo, ND

Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to provide testimony in support of HB 1475 to provide free school lunch for students in grades K-12. In 2017 the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that 6% of children in North Dakota were living in "high poverty areas". In 2022, the Great Plains Food Bank reported that their most recent estimates of food insecurity in the state were 1 in 6 people. To be food insecure is to have an inconsistent or no lack of access to foods, particularly foods that are high in nutrients and minerals. According to Feeding America, a child who is food insecure is at an increased risk of delayed development, chronic illnesses such as asthma and anemia, and behavioral troubles like anxiety, aggression, and hyperactivity. A 2019 study published in the American Academy of Pediatrics reported that asthma diagnosis rates and depressive symptoms were 19.1% and 27.9% higher respectively than children who were not in food insecure households. That same study also noted that foregone medical care rates were 179.8% higher for those same households. In North Dakota, a study by the North Dakota News Cooperative found that 82% of people polled want free school lunches for all students. The statistics prove how important this legislation is, and how widely it is supported in our state.

I understand that for many, the cost of this is prohibitive. I know it's not in the nature of many people to mark a large chunk of money for something that won't benefit themselves at all. But I ask you to look past the price tag and see the change this funding could make in the lives of so many children in North Dakota. Children who are food insecure are fighting an uphill battle for the rest of their lives. One way this can be helped is to ensure that all school

children in our state have access to consistent meals in school. Making sure that all kids, regardless of family income, can have at least five warm and nutritious meals a week is something we should not shy away from. While many kids from impoverished families may already be receiving free lunches, this bill would help the kids whose families currently make just a little too much money to qualify for free meals, but do not make enough money to properly make ends meet. This was my family in 2016 when my mom did what most people would commend her for doing, and got a promotion at work. But with her new job, we didn't qualify for reduced price lunch anymore, and now had to pay full price for three kids eating lunch five days a week. By the end of the school year, we owed over \$1,000. My parents worked hard to pay this off over the summer, but by the end of my senior year (the next school year), we owed close to \$2,000 as we never had enough left over in the months to pay off the debt. I almost didn't get to walk at graduation because we owed lunch money. While that type of consequence is now illegal in North Dakota, this bill will protect more families from having to worry about the debt hanging over their heads, and keep children fed so they can focus in class, play with their friends or in sports after school, and their brain and body can develop fully.

Thank you for your time Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee.

Heather Tyulyandin, West Fargo

## Testimony in Support of HB 1475 HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL STUDENTS 2/3/25

### 2:30pm Education Committee Hearing Coteau AB

Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee. My name is Amy Heuer, Co-Executive Director for the North Dakota Society of Health and Physical Educators (ND SHAPE), a volunteer with the American Heart Association, and a recently retired Middle School Health and Physical Education Teacher. I am here to provide testimony and support for HB 1475.

When I started teaching health and physical education 25 years ago, it was to the alarming news from the National Institute of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), that my daughters' generation would be the first generation to not outlive their parents. They would be the first generation whose life expectancy was shorter than their parents. At the time it was attributed to low activity levels and what was referred to as overeating, causing record levels of childhood obesity.

In these same 25 years, as science has evolved, we have learned that it isn't the extra fatty tissue the body carries, but the damage that it does to our circulatory system, digestive organs, and the brain that is of concern. We are also learning that it is the type of ingredients in the food as much as the amount that can cause the health risk.

Here we are, 25 years later, and we still have the same warning. Our lack of substantive action has not changed the very real issue of our children's life expectancy, quality of life, and the rising cost of obesity. You will be able to read the latest stats and percentages, as well as the cost, both direct and indirect, from other's testimony in support of HB 1475.

While I don't expect Chairman Heinert and the Education Committee to solve all problems associated with childhood obesity, there is something very real that you can start to help all students in North Dakota.

I would like to share some information regarding students and hunger that several studies over the past 15 years agree on.

#### Students that are hungry:

- Have lower math scores, slower memory recall, poorer cognitive functioning.
- Are more likely to be hyperactive, absent, and tardy.
- Teens are more likely to be suspended from school and have difficulty relating to their peers.

#### Students that eat breakfast at school:

- Closer to class and test taking-perform better on standardized tests, and will have significantly higher scores in spelling, reading, and math than those that skipped breakfast.
- Have improved attendance, improved behavior, and less tardiness.
- Eating breakfast improves a child's performance on mathematical tasks, vocabulary tests, cognitive function, attention and memory.

In my many years of teaching, I have seen these results in action. One of the best tools for student engagement I had and used frequently were healthy snacks. If a student was hungry, they knew that Heuer had some healthy snacks to share. I knew that if a students was hungry, they were more likely to stop paying attention, start messing around and be a distraction to other students. I would also like to point out that it did not matter the socioeconomic level of the family as to which students would come to my room for a snack, as even those from affluent families might not have had time for breakfast.

Many conversations in education have centered around how to improve attendance, better manage disciplinary issues, and prepare our students to perform their best academically. One proven way to do this is to feed all of our students healthy breakfast and lunch.

You, Chairman Heinert and the Education Committee, have the ability to support our teachers, and the education of all students in North Dakota, by voting YES to HB 1475, ensuring every student has a nutritious breakfast and lunch. The investment we make in our students today is an investment in their future health and academic success.

I am in support of HB 1474.

Kids go to school and are in the care of the state. Part of that care should be ensuring that they have proper nutrition. It is the morally right thing to do.

It directly benefits the children who are in need of subsidized lunch and everyone around them. Kids aren't going to be performing as well as they could if they're hungry. I imagine they're more likely to be disruptive as well if they're hungry.

It benefits the state as a whole if we provide the children of North Dakota with what is needed to succeed. I don't have children, but that doesn't mean I wouldn't benefit from this as well. We're all better off if this bill becomes law.

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Dr. Grant Syverson and I am writing on behalf of the North Dakota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics in strong support of HB 1475, which ensures that all children in North Dakota will have access to nutritious school meals.

Appropriate childhood nutrition is fundamental for the mental and physical growth of children. Childhood hunger impacts concentration, memory, and engagement. Access to school meals improves nutrition, health outcomes, physical and cognitive development, school performance, and addresses food insecurity. HB 1474 will also remove income-based eligibility requirements which will reduce stigma and provide equitable access to healthy meals.

Studies have shown that access to free school meals can reduce childhood obesity which can prevent related chronic health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease and reduce healthcare costs.

Please support the children of North Dakota and provide a Do Pass recommendation for HB 1475.

Sincerely,

Dr. Grant Syverson

NDAAP Advocacy Liaison

Dear Representatives,

Hello, we are representatives from the Mandan Middle School Student Council testifying on House Bill Number 1475. The Lunch Bill is a huge, constant problem here in our environment. Even we, as students, have had conversations about how, as families with average household income, the lunch account always seems to be empty. Many other students feel this burden constantly weighing them down even stronger and longer than us. This is why the bill should be passed. We believe that every school would benefit.

Many students are in "negatives" or in debt with lunch money. A lot of families struggle to keep up with the never ending lunch fees. We are testifying because we see constant struggle throughout our entire school with meeting their lunch fees. It's difficult for families to deal with the debt stacking high. Students feel tied down and struggle to focus on schoolwork. Lunch should be a necessity. Kids look forward to it, but due the fact that they have negative account balance, it becomes a hassle. Kids feel burdened as if it is their fault, and this leads to bad eating habits, not being able to academically succeed, and negatively impacting social experiences.

When going through the lunch line it is very obvious that students are embarrassed about not being able to get seconds when they are still hungry, not being able to get a small treat, even once a week, or even just getting through the lunch line without seeing the red and negative lunch account money. This is an issue, because for some students, lunch at school is the only thing that they can eat all day and they might not eat all weekend. It is important that they get enough nutritious food when at school to support smart, healthy minds.

Thank you for hearing our testimony and considering our opinion and point of view.

Mandan Middle School Student Council



Contact:
Matt Perdue, Lobbyist
mperdue@ndfu.org | 701.641.3303

Testimony of
Matt Perdue
North Dakota Farmers Union
Before the
House Education Committee
February 3, 2025

Chairman Heinert and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 1475. My name is Matt Perdue, and I am testifying on behalf of North Dakota Farmers Union's (NDFU) members. NDFU supports HB 1475, which provides school meals to all public and private school students at no cost.

NDFU's member-driven Policy & Action supports providing school breakfast and lunch for all children. Our members are proud of their work to provide food, fiber and fuel for our country and world. We feel a strong obligation to connect the food we produce to hungry people, especially those in our own communities. HB 1475 is an important step toward that, ensuring that all students can access healthy school meals.

We respectfully request a "Do Pass" recommendation on HB 1475. Thank you for your consideration.



# Testimony House Bill 1475 House Education Committee Representative Pat D. Heinert, Chair February 3, 2025

Dear Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schrieber-Beck, and members of the committee:

On behalf of Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas (CHAD) and our member community health centers in North Dakota, we ask for your support of HB 1475.

CHAD is a non-profit membership organization that serves as the Primary Care Association for North Dakota and South Dakota, supporting community health centers across both states in their efforts to provide health care to underserved and low-income populations. The health centers we represent have locations in both urban and rural communities (see map on page 2).

Community health centers (CHCs) are non-profit, community-driven primary care clinics that serve all individuals, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. North Dakota is home to five community health center organizations that provide comprehensive, integrated care to more than 36,000 individuals at 22 locations in 20 communities across the state. Sixteen percent of those patients are uninsured and about 40 percent have family incomes below the federal poverty level.

The community health center integrated care model includes primary care, mental health and substance use treatment, dental care, pharmacy services, and a range of case management services that can include help with transportation, finding community resources, or assistance with insurance and financial enrollments. Health centers are essential medical homes where patients find services that promote health, diagnose and treat disease, manage chronic conditions and disabilities, and overcome barriers that prevent them from getting healthy and staying healthy.

CHAD and our members recognize that many factors contribute to a person's overall health. Access to health care is important, but socioeconomic factors such as access to nutritious food play a significant role as well, especially for school aged children. We also know that food insecurity disproportionately affects children from low-income homes.

Community health centers see firsthand the food and nutrition security needs across our state. In fact, preliminary screening data from North Dakota health centers show that food insecurity is the 3rd highest need across the fourteen social determinants of health in 2023. Through a



partnership with the food bank, community health centers in North Dakota have distributed more than 6,700 pounds of food to patients in need over the past year. Still, the need for greater food security in communities remains.

We support efforts to create more sustainable access to healthy food and remove cost barriers for families and individuals. We know there are many policy levers to address food insecurity, and we support this critical discussion.

Please support school meals for all children in our state by supporting HB 1475 with a do pass recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration,

Shannon Bacon
Director of External Affairs
Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas



## Gimme Your Lunch Money! The working poor vs the school bully

#### Tom Grotenhuis

Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education Department, University of Minnesota Crookston

COMP1012: Composition II | Section E92

Professor Rachel McCoppin, PhD

February 4, 2023

#### **Lunch Debt**

There she stands in the lunch line in her small-town elementary school, kicking at a spiraling thread unweaving from a commercial carpet square. The fifth grader is nervous; she is hungry and ashamed. She knows there's negative in her lunch account balance. Until her account goes back to black, the school has the authority to dispose of her intended meal in front of her and her classmates. She didn't even pick a desert today. Her right leg twists as she digs her toes into a well-worn hole in the carpet in front of the cashier. First a squint, then a grimace, but she's seen pity before and knows what comes next: a look at the ground and a nod. She gets to eat her lunch in peace today, despite being a broke elementary student.

This hypothetical situation is a common daily reality within many schools across the country. All 50 states have and allow negative school lunch accounts; however, many states defer to the schools or districts as to how those debts might be collected. In 2021 Minnesota, state law allowed schools to deal with lunch debt in a number of different ways, including: alternative meals, throwing away meals, workfor-meals programs, utilizing collection agencies, or denying student participation in school activities – including graduation (Hanson, 2021).

If schools use this much zeal to collect from accounts in arrears, then school lunch debt must really affect the bottom line. Incorporating bad debt into operating expenses would place undue burden on the taxpayer. However that's not the case. The poorest children in American receive free lunch through the USDA's National

School Lunch Program which has been in place since 1946. Debt falls mostly middle-class families who struggle to make ends meet and haven't applied for or are ineligible for welfare benefits. In fact, according to EducationData.org, for the vast majority of schools, lunch debt is a small fraction of cashflow. Lost revenue due to lunch debt accounted for less than 1% of their annual expense budget at 90% of school surveyed. At only 0.7% of schools surveyed was unpaid debt over 10% of the school's annual expenses (Hanson, 2021).

A universal meal provided free of charge to all students is one solution to that tackles school lunch debt and resolves the conflicts of interest that occur when a school runs a for profit cafeteria. However, opponents continue to argue that it would lead to a needless tax increase for the majority of families who pay lunch out of pocket. When a universal meal bill was proposed in Minessota, January 2023, State Rep. Peggy Bennet argued that it was "shotgun technique instead of a surgical approach." (Cummings, 2023).

What should be considered are economies of scale. Significant cost savings could be realized by dismantling applications and processing aspects of federal relief programs and redirecting funds to at-large communities who are in need. Other costs savings could be realized by utilizing prison labor in state operated kitchens, or by including food preparation into the curriculum itself.

The latter is the idea behind The Edible Schoolyard Project. Alice Waters, celebrity chef and early proponent of the farm-to-table movement founded the project whose

mission is 'dedicated to the transformation of public education by using organic school gardens, kitchens, and cafeterias to teach both academic subjects and the values of nourishment, stewardship, and community.' As of now, the program has been in operation for over 25 years and operates two campuses in California (Waters, n.d.).

Regardless of how a student gets fed, the effects of hunger are universal. While nearly every other function within a school operates for the public good, the cafeteria is operated as a business and mostly at the discretion of the individual school. Universal meals offer a common-sense solution that has already proven itself incredibly effective as demonstrated by the USDA's decision to provide meals free of charge and without application to all students during the COVID-19 pandemic. We owe our children a safe and healthy environment to learn in, including a free lunch.

# **Works Cited**

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- Hanson, M. (2021, October 12). School Lunch Debt Statistics. Retrieved from EducationData.org: https://educationdata.org/school-lunch-debt
- Waters, A. e. (n.d.). About Us. Retrieved from edibleschoolyard.org:

  https://edibleschoolyard.org/about-us

# HB 1475 House Education Committee

Chairman Heinert and Distinguished Members of the House Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to bring HB 1475 before you for your consideration.

For the record, my name is Patrick Hatlestad and I represent District One, which is most of the City of Williston.

The Butterfinger in addition to buttering you up, is a snack to help create an improved cognitive function, an atmosphere of positive listening and hopefully an endorsement of HB 1475

Borrowing a quote from C. Kettering "I expect to spend the rest of my life in the future., So I want to be reasonably sure of what kind of future its going to be." You will have a chance today to look into the future of education in ND and determine what that might be.

Currently eight states offer healthy, free meals regardless of parental income to ensure NO student goes hungry.

HB 1475 provides breakfast and lunch to all students of participating entities, including school districts, nonpublic schools, and tribal schools, at no cost to the student ensuring that all ND children have access to nutritious meals, a safety net for many. By meeting basic needs, we will foster better long-term health outcomes, a persistent school readiness hurdle.

The schools shall meet all the requirements set forth by the ND Superintendent of Schools and the national school lunch program.

The main purpose of the bill is to relieve a child's food insecurity by providing two nutritious meals to all school age children, every day of the school year, because nutrition plays such a critical role in a child's readiness to learn, improved cognitive functions, wellbeing, physical performance, school attendance and often behavior. Meals will not only decrease hunger, improve a child's health, increase readiness to learn, and offers a key opportunity to teach lifetime health and nutrition. Perhaps, also an improved educational climate & test scores.

The treasury of the State of North Dakota shall appropriate the sum of \$140 million or the sum as may be necessary to Superintendent of Public Instruction for the purpose of reimbursing the schools for providing these meals less the amount of any other federal or state or private reimbursement the school district receives for providing meals.

I have searched for a dedicated revenue stream to meet the costs. No luck, or conflicts with existing efforts to reduce taxpayer tax costs. Tough economic situations find many parents living paycheck to paycheck. This will help to reduce potential financial stress.

School districts need to make a concerted effort to encourage those parents, eligible, to sign up for federal assistance thus reducing the local/state costs. I would welcome additional suggestions.

this bill is asking The treasury of the State of North Dakota to appropriate the sum of \$140 million or the sum as may be necessary to the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the purpose of reimbursing the schools for providing these meals less the amount of any other federal or state or private reimbursement the school district receives for providing meals.

#### 2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

#### **Education Committee**

Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

HB 1475 2/10/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to providing breakfast and lunch to all students of participating entities, including school districts, nonpublic schools, and tribal schools, at no cost to the student.

3:47 p.m. Vice Chairman Schreiber-Beck called the meeting to order.

Members present: Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber-Beck, Representatives Hager, Hatlestad, Hauck, Heilman, Jonas, Maki, Marschall, Morton, Novak, Osowski

Members Absent: Representative Longmuir

#### **Discussion Topics:**

- School Meals in North Dakota
- Healthy Meals for Schools
- North Dakota Free School Lunches

3:47 P.M. Representative Heilman moved a Do Pass and rereferred to Appropriations.

3:47 P.M. Representative Morton seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Pat D. Heinert	N
Representative Cynthia Schreiber-Beck	Υ
Representative Liz Conmy	Υ
Representative LaurieBeth Hager	Υ
Representative Patrick R. Hatlestad	Υ
Representative Dori Hauck	N
Representative Matthew Heilman	Υ
Representative Jim Jonas	Υ
Representative Donald W. Longmuir	AB
Representative Roger A. Maki	N
Representative Andrew Marschall	Υ
Representative Desiree Morton	N
Representative Anna S. Novak	Υ
Representative Doug Osowski	N

Motion 8-5-1

Representative Jonas will carry the bill.

3:51 p.m. Chairman Heinert closed the meeting.

House Education Committee HB 1475 2/10/2025 Page 2

Madaline Cooper, Committee Clerk for Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk

# REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE HB 1475 (25.1005.02000)

Module ID: h\_stcomrep\_23\_032

**Carrier: Jonas** 

**Education Committee (Rep. Heinert, Chairman)** recommends **DO PASS** and **BE REREFERRED** to the **Appropriations Committee** (8 YEAS, 5 NAYS, 1 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). HB 1475 was rereferred to the **Appropriations Committee**.

**2025 HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS** 

HB 1475

#### 2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

## **Appropriations Committee**

Roughrider Room, State Capitol

HB 1475 2/20/2025

Relating to septic systems and the environmental quality advisory committee, relating to the powers and duties of the department of environmental quality, boards of health, and public health units, relating to the onsite wastewater recycling technical committee; to provide an appropriation; to provide for a transfer; and to provide an effective date.

3:39 p.m. Chairman Vigesaa called the meeting to order.

Members present: Chairman Vigesaa, Vice Chairman Kempenich, Representatives Anderson, Berg, Bosch, Brandenburg, Fisher, Hanson, Louser, Martinson, Meier, Mitskog, Monson, Murphy, Nathe, Nelson, O'Brien, Pyle, Richter, Sanford, Stemen, Swiontek, Wagner

### **Discussion Topics:**

School meals

3:39 p.m. Representative Heinert introduced the bill.

3:54 p.m. Chairman Vigesaa closed the meeting.

Krystal Eberle for Risa Berube, Committee Clerk

#### 2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

#### **Appropriations Committee**

Roughrider Room, State Capitol

HB 1475 2/20/2025

Relating to providing breakfast and lunch to all students of participating entities, including school districts, nonpublic schools, and tribal schools, at no cost to the student.

6:17 p.m. Chairman Vigesaa opened the meeting.

Members present: Chairman Vigesaa, Vice Chairman Kempenich, Representatives Anderson, Berg, Bosch, Brandenburg, Fisher, Hanson, Louser, Martinson, Meier, Mitskog, Monson, Murphy, Nathe, Nelson, O'Brien, Pyle, Richter, Sanford, Stemen, Swiontek, Wagner

### **Discussion Topics:**

- Committee Action
- 6:18 p.m. Chairman Vigesaa introduced the bill.
- 6:25 p.m. Representative Stemen moved a Do Not Pass.
- 6:25 p.m. Representative Nathe seconded the motion.
- 6:38 p.m. Roll call vote.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigesaa	Υ
Representative Keith Kempenich	Υ
Representative Bert Anderson	Υ
Representative Mike Berg	Υ
Representative Glenn Bosch	Υ
Representative Mike Brandenburg	Υ
Representative Jay Fisher	Υ
Representative Karla Rose Hanson	N
Representative Scott Louser	AB
Representative Bob Martinson	N
Representative Lisa Meier	N
Representative Alisa Mitskog	N
Representative David Monson	Υ
Representative Eric J. Murphy	Υ
Representative Mike Nathe	Υ
Representative Jon O. Nelson	Υ
Representative Emily O'Brien	N
Representative Brandy L. Pyle	Υ
Representative David Richter	N
Representative Mark Sanford	N

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Representative Gregory Stemen	Υ
Representative Steve Swiontek	N
Representative Scott Wagner	Y

6:38 p.m. Motion passed 14-8-1.

6:38 p.m. Representative Murphy will carry the bill.

6:38 p.m. Chairman Vigesaa closed the meeting.

Krystal Eberle for Risa Berube, Committee Clerk

# REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE HB 1475 (25.1005.02000)

Module ID: h\_stcomrep\_31\_024

**Carrier: Murphy** 

**Appropriations Committee (Rep. Vigesaa, Chairman)** recommends **DO NOT PASS** (14 YEAS, 8 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1475 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.