

2026 JOINT APPROPRIATIONS

HB 1624

2026 JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee Brynhild Haugland Room, State Capitol

HB 1624
1/21/2026

A BILL for an Act to create and enact two new sections to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to offering school breakfast and lunch at no cost and the school meals fund; to provide an appropriation; to provide for a transfer; and to provide an effective date.

1:07 p.m. Co-Chairman Vigesaa opened the meeting.

Members present: Co-Chairman Vigesaa, Representatives: Anderson, Berg, Bosch, Brandenburg, Fisher, Ista, Kempenich, Louser, Martinson, Meier, Mitskog, Monson, Murphy, Nathe, Nelson, Pyle, Richter, Sanford, Stemen, Swiontek, Wagner, Warrey, Co-Chairman Bekkedahl, Senators: Burckhard, Cleary, Conley, Davison, Dever, Dwyer, Erbele, Magrum, Mathern, Meyer, Schaible, Sickler, Sorvaag, Thomas, Wanzek

Discussion Topics:

- Century Code
- K-12 Funding
- Breakfast and Lunch School Meals
- SNAP
- Community Eligibility Program
- Department of Public Instruction Funding
- USDA Food Program Regulations
- National School Lunch Program
- School Lunch Debt

1:07 p.m. Representative Nathe introduced the bill and testified in favor.

1:12 p.m. Lynelle Johnson, Director of Child Nutrition and Food Distribution, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, answered questions.

1:46 p.m. Nick Archuleta, President, North Dakota United, testified in favor and answered questions.

2:09 p.m. Shane Goettle, Tusk Philanthropies (Solving Hunger), State Association of Nonpublic Schools (SANS), testified in favor and submitted testimony #45456 & #45408.

2:12 p.m. Stephen McDonough, Retired Pediatrician, testified in favor and submitted testimony #45409.

2:13 p.m. David Tamisiea, Executive Director, North Dakota Catholic Conference, testified in favor and submitted testimony #45407.

2:18 p.m. Mike Krumwiede, American Heart Association, testified in favor.

Additional written testimony:

#45406, #45410, #45413, #45414, #45421, #45422, #45425, #45426, #45428, #45429, #45430, #45431, #45435, #45439, #45442, #45445, #45446, #45447, #45449, #45451, #45452, #45455, #45458, #45460

2:19 p.m. Co-Chairman Vigesaa closed the meeting

Krystal Eberle, Committee Clerk

Chairman Bekkedahl, **Chairman** Vigesaa, and Honorable Members of the *Joint Appropriations Committee*:

It is an honor to write to you today as I testify in support of HB1624. The state constitution matters, my generation matters, and North Dakota matters.

The Constitution of North Dakota- must be held to a high standard, and when it comes to passing policy that benefits every student in North Dakota, the Constitution must be involved. This bill ensures that every student, regardless of income, gets access to free meals. It is the only piece of legislation in this special session that guarantees universal access. Needless to say, free meals for every student are a blessing. But what better way to ensure that this blessing sticks around than to put it in our laws? Enshrining policy like this in the North Dakota Century Code is the best way to ensure its continuation and to do our Constitution justice.

Appropriations specifically- My generation is watching our world fall apart. Day by day, our future looks grimmer. Housing and college are completely unaffordable, and the cost of living has skyrocketed. But what gives us hope is when our Legislature stands up for us and looks out for us. **This bill isn't legislating welfare;** this bill is legislating the future. **There is a difference between giving people handouts and giving them a hand up.** In this case, you give my generation a hand up in a world and a nation where monopolies control the economy. This world is cruel, but America is the one place where that cruelty cannot stop opportunity. Yet, with the cost of living only going up, those opportunities are being lost. This bill is one of the many ways you can give my generation more opportunities and a better shot at life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I urge you to give us the hand up we need.

North Dakota- But don't just do it for us. Do it for ND. The great state of North Dakota has a legacy of being legendary. My generation wants to be part of that legacy, but the only way we can is if we receive a good education and have a stable future. A good meal to start the day is how we get the best education North Dakota has to offer, and a stable future can only come from minds and bodies that were nourished at a young age. If you want a brighter future for North Dakota, you must leave the North Dakotans who will live in the future well equipped. **We're not asking you to parent us;** we're asking you to lend a helping hand. Legendary Communities stick together. You are a part of our community.. so why not chip in?

At a time when everything seems uncertain and hopeless, a blessing is always the remedy. So I implore you to give a **DO PASS** recommendation to HB1624.. for our Constitution, my generation, and our state.

The Peace of the Lord be with you,

Carter Hass



Representing the Diocese of Fargo
and the Diocese of Bismarck

103 South Third Street
Suite 10
Bismarck ND 58501
701-223-2519
ndcatholic.org
ndcatholic@ndcatholic.org

To: House Joint Appropriations Committee
From: David Tamisiea, Executive Director
Subject: House Bill 1624 - Universal School Meals
Date: January 21, 2026

The North Dakota Catholic Conference supports House Bill 1624.

HB 1624 would provide one breakfast and one lunch each school day to students enrolled in K-12 schools in North Dakota at no cost to the student or the student's family. Public schools are required to participate in this universal school meal program, and nonpublic schools, tribal schools, and schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Education may opt in to the program.

The North Dakota Catholic Conference supports HB 1624 for the following reasons:

Better Student Health and Improved Learning Outcomes: Ensuring students receive a nutritional breakfast and lunch each school day is expected to improve learning outcomes. Students attending school without having healthy meals experience significant negative impacts, including poor concentration, memory issues, behavioral problems, more frequent illness and absenteeism, difficulty learning, and lower test scores, as hunger and poor nutrition directly hinder cognitive function and health.¹

Strong Support Among North Dakotans for Universal School Meals: As reported recently in the Fargo Forum, StrongND, a 501(c)(4) political advocacy organization associated with Governor Armstrong, conducted a poll from January 10-14, 2026, of mostly Republican-leaning and conservative voters in North Dakota, to gauge their support for a universal school meal program in North Dakota.² The results showed 65% in support vs 32% opposed. Widespread support among North Dakotans for universal school meals is also suggested by the proposed citizen-initiated ballot measure for November 2026 seeking to amend the North Dakota Constitution which mirrors HB 1624.

Alleviates Financial Burdens on Families: Universal school meals provide needed relief for families today struggling to make ends meet due to inflationary pressures and the high cost of living. This burden is keenly felt by families with children in nonpublic schools. HB 1624 would benefit all North Dakota students and their families and, because it would be a

¹ "How Does Hunger Affect Learning?", on NoKidHungry website, at <https://www.nokidhungry.org/blog/how-does-hunger-affect-learning> (accessed January 20, 2026)

² "Poll shows support for universal school lunches in North Dakota," Rob Port, *Fargo Forum* (January 19, 2026), at <https://www.inforum.com/opinion/columns/port-poll-shows-strong-support-for-universal-school-lunches-in-north-dakota> (accessed January 20, 2026)

statutory law, could more readily be modified and adjusted by the North Dakota Legislature to fit future needs and circumstances.

We urge a **Do Pass** recommendation on House Bill 1624.

**Testimony of Shane Goettle
on behalf of Solving Hunger, Tusk Philanthropies**

**Chairman Bekkedahl & Chairman Vigesaa
North Dakota Joint Appropriations Committee
January 21, 2026**

HB 1624

Chairmen Bekkedahl and Vigesaa and members of the Joint Appropriations Committee, my name is Shane Goettle and today I am presenting testimony for *Solving Hunger*, a project of Tusk Philanthropies, that is dedicated to ending child hunger.

Solving Hunger is working in North Dakota because of our state's decision to expand school meals in the last two sessions. They are encouraging us to do more to ensure that all children have the nutrition they need. HB 1624 is the answer. Hungry kids can't learn.

Solving Hunger has been involved with this work for nearly ten years, in 27 states. In addition to North Dakota, the organization is working this year in Virginia, Kentucky, New Jersey, and South Carolina, where last week, **Governor Henry McMaster** announced funding for universal school breakfast in his recommended budget to the legislature.

"I think the system would operate better if it were universal," Governor McMaster said. "The cost is minimal compared to the positive impact."

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders of Arkansas has been a leader for free breakfast for all students. She has expanded her efforts there, launching an initiative which will improve child nutrition and support farmers and producers across the state, giving kids more access to fresh, locally sourced products served in schools.

Solving Hunger agrees with these Governors. When every child is offered meals at school, it's an efficient and direct benefit to kids. In states that have implemented free school meals for every child, kids are healthier, attendance in school improves, test scores rise, graduation rates increase, and kids are happier since they no longer face stigma. Their parents are saving \$1,200-\$1,500 per child per school year, which also makes school meals an answer to the affordability issues that families face today.

Solving Hunger applauds Department of Public Instruction, whose leaders have worked closely with them over the years to learn what's happening in other states, and for the philanthropy to understand the unique challenges in North Dakota, especially in rural areas.

Local parents, teachers, and organizations dedicated to health of North Dakota residents have worked for years to bring this issue to the forefront, and *Solving Hunger* applauds them. They know what the philanthropy has seen in every other state in which they've worked: Feeding kids is enormously popular across states, no matter size, urban/rural characteristics of a state, or political differences. In poll after poll across the nation, red states and blue, more than 80% of voters want to make sure kids don't go hungry and they agree that the best way to do that is by making sure they eat at school.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify and thank you for your work on behalf of North Dakota's children.

Testimony in support of HB 1624

A BILL for an Act to create and enact two new sections to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to offering school breakfast and lunch at no cost and the school meals fund; to provide an appropriation; to provide for a transfer; and to provide an effective date.

Joint Appropriations January 21, 2026

Mr. Chairman and committee members. My name is Stephen McDonough. I am providing testimony in support of HB 1624.

I am a board-certified pediatrician who worked in North Dakota for forty-five years, from 1980 to 2025 including the communities of Grand Forks, Bismarck, Linton and Watford City. I worked at the ND Department of Health from 1985 to 2000 and served at times as the Director of Maternal and Child Health and Chief Medical Officer.

I started, with others, a children's nutrition program with the Grand Forks Public Health Department in 1984. I served on the President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition from 2010 to 2017. I was asked to serve on the sponsoring committee of the initiated measure for school meals in November 2025.

Good nutrition for children is a top priority for most pediatricians and we counsel parents on their child's nutrition from the newborn age to the end of childhood.

HB 1624 to provide free school meals is an excellent idea that should demonstrably improve public health in North Dakota.

Studies have shown free school meals improve nutrition with better consumption of fruits and vegetables, reduce childhood obesity and lessen food insecurity. Students learn better, have better focus and attendance. There are social and economic benefits including less stigma, reduced financial pressure on families, more efficient school operations and greater farm to school food programs.

Results from the N.D. Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a representative survey of middle and high school students, showed decreased consumption of fruits and vegetables. In 2003, 31.5 percent of students ate 2 or more servings of vegetables a day in the past week and only 23.2 percent in 2023. In 2003, 25.1 percent ate 2 or more servings of fruits a day in the past week and only 22.8 percent in 2023.

Five servings of fruits or vegetables a day are recommended for ideal nutrition.

Children become adults and childhood habits become adult habits. N.D. adults are having increased rates of diabetes (8.2 percent in 2011, 10.6 percent in 2024). N.D. adults are more likely to be obese (27.8 percent in 2011, 36.8 percent in 2024, the 13th highest in the USA).

Obesity is second only to tobacco as the leading cause of preventable deaths and an important cause of diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and certain types of cancers. The health of North Dakotans is worsening, not getting better.

Free school meals have broad public support in North Dakota. A November 2024 poll by the N.D. News Cooperative found 82% of North Dakotans favor state involvement in providing free meals, with high support across Democrats (95%), Independents (82%), and Republicans (76%).

Stephen McDonough MD

References:

Maureen K Spill, Rupal Trivedi, Rachel C Thorig, Arin A Balalian, Marlene B Schwartz, Craig Gundersen, Angela Odoms-Young, Elizabeth F Racine, Margaret J Foster, Julie S Davis, Amanda J MacFarlane. Universal Free School Meals and School and Student Outcomes: A Systematic Review. JAMA Netw Open. 2024 Aug 9;7(8):e2424082. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.24082

North Dakota Youth Risk Behavior Survey-

<https://www.hhs.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/DOH%20Legacy/YRBS/2023%20High%20School%20Trends.pdf>

North Dakota Behavioral Risk Factor Survey- <https://www.hhs.nd.gov/health/BRFSS/Data>

I write in support of providing school meals to k-12 students at no charge to them. The state can afford it; it helps level the playing field for disadvantaged children, would help attract people to the state. If this bill does not pass I will be voting for the constitutional amendment. Thank you.

House Joint Appropriations Committee
Jan 21st, 2025 HB 1624
Testimony in Support

Dear members of the House Joint Appropriations Committee,

I'm a lifelong North Dakotan, a suicide prevention activist, and a kid who grew up hungry. While the stability of my homelife fluctuated, what was always stable was the school and the meals I would be able to eat there.

However, as I grew into a teenager, I was given money to buy food at school. Instead of doing that, I would just pocket it and starve, because it was a way to buy things I wanted. This wasn't anything I told anyone about, nor did my mom ever know I was starving myself. Luckily, she isn't one to read legislative testimony, so I think I'm still in the clear.

I remember starving in class and not being able to think or concentrate. I remember this made the whole school experience miserable in ways that increased my other risk factors and led me to dropping out. And the decision I made was not responsible, but I was a kid. I wasn't making responsible decisions. And I think something lost when we talk about parental responsibility or cost or anything of this nature is that when our systems are anything less than every kid gets fed, the only thing we introduce into those systems is kids who, for several reasons, are going to starve.

We are an agricultural state with kids that grow up hungry, and I think that's perhaps our biggest failure and shame.

Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey says that a little over 2% of our youth reported being hungry most of the time because there was not enough food at home within the last thirty days. And I know 2% doesn't seem like a lot, but we have over 100,000 youth in our school systems, and that means over 2,000 of them are saying they're hungry.

Keep in mind that I'm typing a few hundred words about state systems that are extremely complex and nuanced. Data that is itself complex and nuanced. I don't know what is possible for funding, but I know one thing, funding that goes into feeding kids is the best investment in the future of North Dakota we can make. It is an invaluable investment and one that would make us all proud to be North Dakotans.

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

**Do Not Pass Testimony
of Doug Sharbono, citizen of North Dakota
on HB1624
in the Sixty-ninth Legislative Assembly Special Session of ND**

Dear Madam Chair Lee and members of the Joint Policy Committee,

I am writing as a citizen and believe HB1624 is unneeded legislation.

There is no limitation in the bill for a per plate expenditure for the State, A school district could simply serve steak and eggs for breakfast and lobster for lunch and the bill as written would require the state to reimburse.

As this bill is written, the school district could decide to upgrade the free and reduced meals to premium meals, but necessarily more nutritious, and the state taxpayer would be on the hook for this extra upgrade in cost that does not necessarily correlate to quality.

This is clearly a “cradle to grave” continuing approach of grooming society to be dependent. For this “cradle to grave” approach, there are no cost controls.

There is no credible data indicating this additional expenditure is needed. The children in poverty and above poverty are provided meals right now.

This bill would feed children from families in the upper income brackets. Is this responsible for our state? No.

This bill defies the stated platform of the NDGOP. It compromises Individual Liberty, Personal Responsibility, Limited Government, and Lower Taxes. This bill also defies how many republican and democrat families currently live their lives in self-sufficiency.

Please give HB 1624 a Do Not Pass.

Thank you,

Doug Sharbono
1708 9th St S
Fargo, ND 58103

Members of the Legislative Assembly,

I am writing to ask you to support HB 1624 for universal breakfast and lunch for all ND students. Food costs continue to rise for families, and along with it so do lunch prices at school. Just this school year our breakfast and lunch prices both had an increase.

For lunch alone for a week for my three children, it would be \$78.75 - and that is assuming my high schooler does not get "doubles" if he is really hungry as his almost six-foot-tall body keeps growing. In a typical month this would be \$315-400 just for lunches.

Due to the cost I tend to pack lunches for my kids, but even then, with current grocery prices it can be a burden some weeks. Universal free lunch – for public and private schools - would give our family the breathing room to know that if our grocery budget is tight in the moment, my kids breakfast and lunch would still be taken care of. I know for many of the families in our social circle and beyond the same sentiment would be shared.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the matter.

Samantha Bice
District 40
Minot

Hello,

I'm writing to urge you to pass HB1624 to make universal school lunches for students k-12 in North Dakota. I am a single mother who is working full time and going to be starting college classes again soon. I have one daughter currently in school an one will be starting next year. Hb1624 would greatly help with the financial burden on my family. While I am able to scrape together the money for school lunches (usually), I know that for many children in ND and around the country, school lunch may be the only guaranteed meal during the day. For those families who struggle to provide, paying for school lunch adds another stressor into the current financial stress, which for many people like me has become devastating. Please vote to pass HB1624 and help ND families better care for their children.

Abigail Shaw, Minot ND

Dear ND Legislators,

I am writing in support of HB 1624 and the effort to provide free breakfast and lunch to North Dakota students.

Although my family's children attend private school, the availability of free meals has a meaningful impact on our household. Not having to pay for school meals makes private school tuition more accessible for families like ours and allows us to continue prioritizing both a high-quality education and healthy, nourishing food for our children. This support helps families make choices that best meet their children's educational and nutritional needs.

North Dakota is a state rich in resources and opportunity. With the wealth and stability our state enjoys, it is worth asking why we would not invest more directly in our youth. Children are the future of our communities, our workforce, and our economy. Ensuring they are well-fed and ready to learn is a practical, effective way to support their success and long-term well-being.

Programs like this also make North Dakota an even more appealing place to live and raise a family. Supporting families through universal access to school meals strengthens communities, reduces financial stress, and demonstrates that our leadership values children and education as foundational priorities. HB 1624 is a positive step in that direction.

Thank you for your time and for considering this important legislation. I encourage you to support HB 1624 for the benefit of North Dakota students and families.

Sincerely,

Jalisa Tinnes



Fr. Jady Nelson
School President
316 11th Ave NW
Minot, ND 58703

January 21, 2026

Honorable Representatives and Senators:

HB 1624 is the result of a continuing political conversation about the fittingness of a universal school lunch program. I applaud the legislature for taking up this bill in this special legislative session, which is where this issue should be dealt with. Paying for school lunches ought not be legislated through a constitutional amendment.

I support the passage of HB 1624 as it is written. The children that attend Bishop Ryan Catholic School are North Dakota students. Our students are children of North Dakota taxpayers, worthy of investment, worthy of educating, worthy of feeding. Our school already participates in the USDA school lunch program; there is no reason to keep us from the opportunity to opt-in to this program, if passed.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Jady Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Jady Nelson

Good morning

Please consider supporting HB 1624. Establishing universal school meals would tremendously help my family. I have 6 children that are in school and our grocery bill, as you can imagine, is very high. If my children were able to get their breakfast and lunches at school, that would help our family. It would also be great for my children to receive a hot lunch at school. When sending them to school with a home lunch, it mostly is a sandwich and a piece of fruit, as that is what our budget can provide. For my children to get breakfast and lunch at school, it costs almost \$800 a month.

Thank you for your time and all you do!

I'm writing to share my perspective on HB 1624, which currently proposes fully free school meals for all North Dakota students. While I deeply support the bill's goal of ensuring every child has access to nutritious food during the school day, I believe the state could better balance family support with long-term fiscal responsibility by amending the bill to create a universally reduced, subsidized lunch program instead of a fully free one.

Recent legislative reporting estimates that a fully universal meal program could cost the state around \$65 million annually, with projections suggesting costs may continue to rise in future bienniums. Lawmakers have expressed concerns that such mandated spending may limit the state's financial flexibility in years when revenues decline. At the same time, one in seven North Dakota children lives in poverty, demonstrating a clear need for accessible, affordable meals statewide. [\[kfgo.com\]](#), [\[inforum.com\]](#) [\[kfgo.com\]](#) [\[demnpl.com\]](#)

From my own experience as an educator, I see firsthand how much families appreciate support with meal costs—and how essential it is that students are well-fed in order to learn. But I also recognize the importance of maintaining financial fidelity at the state level. A universally reduced, subsidized lunch model would continue to ease the burden on families while avoiding the steep and unpredictable costs of a fully free system. Some lawmakers have already explored broader eligibility expansions—such as supporting families up to 300% of the federal poverty level—as a more sustainable alternative that still meaningfully benefits students. [\[newsfromth...states.com\]](#)

This approach would also reduce stigma and paperwork barriers, which currently prevent some families from applying for free or reduced meals. A universal reduction, rather than fully free meals, would keep participation high and predictable and help ensure that no child is singled out based on family income. [\[demnpl.com\]](#)

For these reasons, I respectfully urge consideration of an amendment to HB 1624 that adopts a universally reduced, subsidized school meal program. This balanced solution supports families, protects the state's financial future, and keeps the focus on student well-being—where it belongs.

Thank you for your time,

Laura Mibeck

Hello!

My name is Terri Niess. I am a teacher and mother of five school-aged children. Having lunches paid for my children would help my family immensely. School lunches add up, as they can be around \$3 a kid per day, totaling almost \$300 per month, or almost \$3000 per year. This does not include extra milks, extra lunches, or snacks that are also part of the school experience. I can't adequately put into words the difference that having those lunches paid for and how it would affect my family. It simply would make a huge difference.

Thank you for considering supporting the bill HB 1624 this January.

Sincerely,

Terri Niess

Bishop Ryan Teacher

Minot, ND

To: Chairperson and Legislator Committee

From: Beth Beck

Subject: Support for Free School Lunches HB 1624

Dear Legislators,

I am writing to express my strong support for **Free School Lunches HB 1624**, which would provide free school lunches to all students, regardless of income, in ND.

No child should have to learn on an empty stomach. Yet, every day, students across our state face hunger that impacts their ability to focus, participate, and thrive academically. Free school meals are not just a matter of nutrition—they are an investment in equity, health, and the future of our communities.

Research consistently shows that access to nutritious meals improves academic performance, reduces absenteeism, and supports healthy development. Universal free lunch programs also remove the stigma and administrative burdens associated with income-based eligibility, ensuring that every child is treated with dignity.

By passing this bill, we can:

- **Eliminate hunger in classrooms** and give every student a fair chance to succeed.
- **Support working families** by reducing financial strain.
- **Promote health and well-being** through consistent access to balanced meals.

I urge you to vote in favor of **Free School Lunches HB 1624** and take this important step toward ensuring that no child in our state goes hungry at school.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your commitment to the well-being of our children.

Sincerely,

Beth Beck

2008 11th Ave SW

Devils Lake, ND 58301

701-230-1550



Contact:
Ryan Gregg, Legislative Specialist
rgregg@ndfu.org | 701.952.0104

**Testimony of
Ryan Gregg
North Dakota Farmers Union
Before the
Joint Appropriations Committee
January 21, 2026**

Chairman Bekkedahl and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 1624. My name is Ryan Gregg, and I am testifying on behalf of North Dakota Farmers Union's (NDFU) members. NDFU supports HB 1624, 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 1624 is an important step toward that, ensuring that all students can access healthy school meals.

We respectfully request a "Do Pass" recommendation on HB 1624. Thank you for your consideration.

Chair and Members of the Legislature,

I respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 1624, which establishes a Universal School Meals Program for North Dakota students in grades K–12.

It is a well-known practical and medical fact that children who have proper nourishment do much better in the areas of concentration, attendance and academic achievements in the short and long-term.

I have been shocked to learn from North Dakota, teachers and principles that hunger exists even areas such as Bismarck.

Applying a school meal program to all students remove stigma and supports working families.

This is an excellent investment in North Dakota's future citizens.

Thank you.

Sincerely.

Raymond S Gruby, M. D.



January 21, 2026

Joint Chambers,

On June 4th, 2024, 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 1624** 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

Free school lunches are not simply a convenience—they are a critical lifeline, especially for foster children. Many children in foster care experience food insecurity due to frequent placement changes, disrupted routines, and household financial strain. School may be the only consistent environment in their lives, and a guaranteed nutritious meal provides stability in the midst of uncertainty.

For foster children, hunger is more than an empty stomach; it directly affects their ability to learn, regulate emotions, and feel safe. Trauma and instability already place these students at higher risk for academic struggles and behavioral challenges. Expecting a child to focus, participate, or succeed while hungry only deepens existing inequities. Free school lunches remove one immediate barrier to learning and support healthier physical and emotional development.

Universal access to free school meals also protects dignity. Foster children often work hard to blend in and avoid standing out. Programs that provide meals to all students eliminate stigma, ensuring no child is singled out because of their circumstances. This inclusivity fosters a more supportive school climate where children feel valued and cared for.

Investing in free school lunches is an investment in foster children's well-being, educational success, and long-term outcomes. When we meet basic needs like nutrition, we send a powerful message: every child matters, and their ability to thrive should never depend on factors beyond their control.

Our team at Foster Hope has seen an increase in hunger, making us pivot to provide snack packs for children entering foster care. We team up with local businesses in food collection. We can not keep up with the demand. This is a very real, a very critical need, and free school lunches would greatly decrease food insecurity.

Testimony in Support of HB 1624 – Universal School Meals

January 21, 2026

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is **Tracey Miller**, and I am a parent of children who attend a private Catholic school in **Bismarck, North Dakota**. I am writing in support of **HB 1624**, and specifically to emphasize the importance of keeping **nonpublic schools included** in this legislation. Families who choose nonpublic education are North Dakota families, and our children are North Dakota children. Preserving the option for nonpublic schools to participate reflects our shared values of fairness, inclusion, and support for all students—because at the end of the day, we are all North Dakotans.

Each morning when I drop my children off at school, I am struck by how many other working parents I see doing the very same thing—juggling jobs, schedules, and responsibilities, all while trying to provide the very best environment possible for their children. These moments are a reminder that families across North Dakota, regardless of background or income, are doing their best to raise healthy, engaged, and supported kids.

When we talk about nonpublic schools, it's important to remember the real families behind them—working parents making thoughtful, sometimes difficult decisions in the best interest of their children. Choosing a school today is very different than it was historically. In recent years, education has become more polarized, and agendas are increasingly pushed on children at younger and younger ages. For our family, a Catholic education aligns with our values and provides a stable, values-based environment where our children can learn, grow, and thrive.

We are deeply grateful to live in a state like North Dakota—where we have strong school systems, exceptional educators, and incredibly hardworking school staff across both public and nonpublic schools.

HB 1624 represents a practical, unifying way to support families across our state. I strongly support its passage and encourage lawmakers to preserve the option for nonpublic schools to participate.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your consideration of this important legislation.

Respectfully,

Tracey Miller

Bismarck, North Dakota

Parent of Light of Christ Catholic Schools Student(s)

To our ND Legislatures,

Please vote in support of the HB1624. All of our ND children should be provided with Free Breakfast and Lunch. These children are our future and when they go to school, the last thing they should worry about is whether they can eat or not. I believe our kids would be able to do better in school if they knew they would be fed for both breakfast and lunch and it would give them the nourishment they need to learn and retain the information our teachers are teaching them.

Providing free school lunches for all students is a powerful investment in the health, dignity, and success of our children. No child should have to learn while hungry or feel singled out because of their family's financial situation. Universal free meals ensure that every student begins the school day with the nourishment they need to focus, grow, and thrive.

When meals are free for everyone, stigma is removed. Children are not labeled or separated based on income, and families who may be struggling quietly are supported with dignity. Free lunches also reduce administrative burdens for schools, allowing staff to focus more time and energy on educating and caring for students rather than managing paperwork and eligibility requirements.

Research and experience consistently show that well-nourished students have better concentration, improved behavior, higher attendance, and stronger academic outcomes. In addition, free meals support working families who are facing rising costs for housing, food, and childcare, even if they do not qualify for traditional assistance programs.

At its core, offering free lunches to all students reflects our shared responsibility to care for children and support their well-being. When we ensure that every child is fed, we create stronger schools, healthier communities, and a more equitable future for all.

Michelle Clouse
Principal St. Joseph Catholic School
Devils Lake

Testimony in support of HB1624

Universal school meals in ND would be such a positive for our school kids. So many are reliant on hot school meals because of unfortunate family circumstances where the cost of school lunch may cause an additional burden.

Please vote in favor of this bill, thank you.

Joanne Christianson Podruchny

Dear North Dakota Legislators,

I am writing in support of HB 1624 and, more importantly, in support of providing meaningful relief to North Dakota families across our state's education system.

I am grateful for my childhood experience attending small, Class B public schools – Ray Public School from 1996-2004, and Tioga High School from 2005-2009. Growing up, I had no awareness of what school meals cost, and I do not recall a single instance of a student being denied a meal. My family had limited financial means, and it is my understanding that we qualified for reduced-price meals. Even so, meal costs were never a visible burden for my parents, nor was access to food ever a concern for me during my school years.

Today, my wife and I have two children, one of whom began kindergarten this past fall. While we are fortunate to have stable careers and relative success, enrolling our daughter in a private school was not an easy decision. We ultimately chose private education because we believe it is the best fit for her, both academically and personally. Our decision was influenced largely by our daughter's unique, visible physical condition of her hand, and our desire was to place her in a setting where she could thrive with fewer social and self-esteem challenges. As parents, we made the choice to prioritize her well-being over financial implications, accepting the risks that come with that decision.

I recognize that our situation may be unique, but I also know that families like ours are not alone. Parents make educational choices for many valid reasons, and I am not here to debate the merits of public versus private education. I am a product of small-town public schools and now a parent navigating private education in today's higher cost environment, and I greatly appreciate both systems. My point is simply this: regardless of school choice, no child should have to worry about whether they will be able to eat at school, and no family should face additional financial stress in the lunchroom.

North Dakota has the resources and the opportunity to make a lasting, generational impact on the lives of its children. I strongly encourage you to work alongside your constituents to ensure that ALL children, regardless of where their parents choose to enroll, have access to meals without financial burden.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,

Brett Tinnes

Tioga High School, Class of 2009

Minot State University, Class of 2013

Minot, North Dakota

Providing breakfast and lunch at school would make a meaningful difference for my family and many others in our community. Knowing that my children receive healthy, reliable meals at school helps reduce financial strain, saves time in the mornings, and ensures they are ready to learn. For families juggling rising food costs, work schedules, and childcare responsibilities, school meals are not a convenience—they are a necessity. When children are not distracted by hunger, they can focus, behave better in class, and fully participate in their education. Investing in school meals is an investment in students' health, learning, and long-term success.

Beyond my own children, as a school administrator I see the financial strain placed on families across the board—especially those who earn just above the threshold for assistance and still struggle to make ends meet. Providing a basic need such as consistent, scheduled meals creates a stable baseline that allows all students to come to school ready to succeed.

**Joint Appropriation Committee
Chairmen Bekkedahl and Vigessa
HB 1624 – School Breakfast and Lunch
Submitted by: Shane Goettle, on behalf of the State Association of Nonpublic Schools
(SANS)**

January 21, 2026

Chairmen Bekkedahl and Vigessa and Members of the Committee: My name is Shane Goettle, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the State Association of Nonpublic Schools (SANS) in support of House Bill 1624.

HB 1624 creates a statewide framework to ensure that every North Dakota student has access to one breakfast and one lunch each school day at no cost. It authorizes reimbursement for schools, establishes a dedicated School Meals Fund, and appropriates \$65 million to implement the program. This bill will benefit all students--public, nonpublic, tribal, and BIE--and supports families during a time of rising costs.

HB 1624 provides meaningful financial relief to families

North Dakota families are facing rising food, housing, and childcare expenses. Even with the efficiencies of school meal programs, the cost of feeding a child breakfast and lunch daily amounts to roughly \$1,800 per school year for many households--a significant burden discussed by school leaders.

HB 1624 entirely eliminates this cost for families with children in participating schools (public schools are required to participate; nonpublic schools may opt in). This is a benefit to *all* North Dakota families with school-age children.

Well-nourished students learn better

Administrators across school types agree that students who come to school hungry struggle with attention, engagement, and performance.

HB 1624 supports improved statewide educational outcomes by ensuring consistent access to nutritious meals--the very foundation of student readiness. The bill ties reimbursement to participation in the USDA child nutrition programs and encourages families to apply for free or reduced-price meals, ensuring efficient, accountable administration. This positions North Dakota to support stronger outcomes on state assessments and daily learning.

Aligns with the state's obligation to support compulsory education

North Dakota requires children to attend school. When the state mandates attendance, it accepts a responsibility to ensure basic conditions for learning--including nutrition.

HB 1624 reflects that principle by guaranteeing every student access to meals at school, regardless of family income, school type, or geographic location.

The bill reflects overwhelming public support

Recent polling shows support for universal school meals at levels such as 80/20 among North Dakota voters. They reflect what our schools hear consistently from families: School meals for all children is common-sense, broadly supported policy.

HB 1624 channels that popular support into a clear, effective statutory approach.

HB 1624 offers a clear, practical process for implementation

HB 1624:

- Provides direct reimbursement for the difference between maximum federal rates and what schools actually receive.
- Creates a School Meals Fund in the state treasury.
- Transfers \$65 million from the Strategic Investment and Improvements Fund to pay for the program.
- Ensures the Superintendent of Public Instruction has rulemaking authority for timely implementation.

This structure keeps administration straightforward, predictable, and equitable across public, nonpublic, tribal, and BIE schools.

Nonpublic schools appreciate the bill's voluntary opt-in approach. Many are prepared to participate and communicate quickly with families about program requirements, including the encouragement to submit federal meal eligibility information.

6. HB 1624 is preferable to a constitutional ballot measure

As Rep. Nathe and others have noted, if the Legislature addresses this issue through statute, it reduces the likelihood of a constitutional measure being pursued. HB 1624 keeps policy flexible and within legislative oversight rather than locking it into the constitution.

Conclusion

HB 1624 is a strong policy that: supports all North Dakota families, improves educational outcomes, aligns with the state's responsibility for children it requires to attend school, reflects overwhelming public support, provides an efficient reimbursement mechanism, includes nonpublic schools in a sensible way. On behalf of the State Association of Nonpublic Schools, I respectfully urge this committee to give **HB 1624 a Do Pass recommendation**.

Thank you for your consideration.

Katie Cashman Fitzsimmons

District 35, Bismarck

cashmankatie@gmail.com

Good afternoon, Chairs Representative Vigesaa and Senator Bekkedahl, and members of the Joint Appropriations Committee. My name is Katie Cashman Fitzsimmons and though I serve as the Director of Student Affairs for the North Dakota University System, today I present to you as a parent asking for your support on HB 1624.

My husband and I have three kids, each enrolled in Kindergarten, 3rd grade, and 5th grade. Since August 2025, we have spent \$1,662.40 on school meals for our kids and we're on track to spend another \$1400 before the end of the school year. To have this relief would be huge for our family as costs all around us are skyrocketing. We can't leave the grocery store for less than \$250 and to keep up with all other costs that come with having a family and a modest home, it feels like we are hemorrhaging cash every minute of each day.

I was thrilled with the \$1600 property tax relief; seeing that bill last month felt fantastic; thank you for that! But then my mind went immediately to those that rent their homes and did not see that relief. This bill would be a wonderful equalizer for families with kids in public or private schools all while simply doing the right thing for our kids.

All North Dakotan legislators have been so careful and responsible with our tax dollars; I appreciate the tough decisions you have made and the conservative moves you have planned. But we can also have nice things and make things easier when it makes sense. This policy not only makes sense from a public health perspective; we have the knowledge that it will be good for all families and we have the money to pay for it. Truly, this feels like a no-brainer.

Thank you for your careful consideration for this and all other issues you'll be considering this week during the special session. Happy New Year to you and yours and please vote green on HB 1624.

Very Sincerely,

Katie Cashman Fitzsimmons

Bismarck, ND

District 35

Chair and members of the committee,

I am a Licensed, Registered Dietitian and a parent of teenage children in North Dakota schools, and I strongly support providing free breakfast and lunch for all students.

Adequate nutrition is directly linked to academic success and health. Research shows that students who participate in school meal programs have improved attention, higher test scores, and fewer behavioral issues compared to peers who are food insecure. School meals are designed to meet federal nutrition standards and often provide more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein than meals children may otherwise consume.

Food insecurity affects families across income levels. According to USDA data, even households above the poverty threshold experience periods of food insecurity due to rising food costs, housing expenses, and unstable incomes. Universal free meals eliminate stigma, increase participation, and ensure that all children have consistent access to nutritious food during the school day.

From a parent's perspective, school meals provide reliability. Even in households that plan carefully, busy mornings, long commutes, and extracurricular schedules can result in children starting the school day without adequate nutrition. Universal access ensures no child is distracted by hunger while trying to learn.

Providing free breakfast and lunch for all students is an investment in North Dakota's children, education system, and future workforce.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sara Laite
Devils Lake, ND
701-371-6787

2026 JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee Brynhild Haugland Room, State Capitol

HB 1624
1/21/2026

A BILL for an Act to create and enact two new sections to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to offering school breakfast and lunch at no cost and the school meals fund; to provide an appropriation; to provide for a transfer; and to provide an effective date.

6:31 p.m. Co-Chairman Vigesaa opened the meeting.

Members present: Co-Chairman Vigesaa, Representatives: Anderson, Berg, Bosch, Brandenburg, Fisher, Ista, Kempenich, Louser, Martinson, Meier, Mitskog, Monson, Murphy, Nathe, Nelson, Pyle, Richter, Sanford, Stemen, Swiontek, Wagner, Warrey, Co-Chairman Bekkedahl, Senators: Burckhard, Cleary, Conley, Davison, Dever, Dwyer, Erbele, Magrum, Mathern, Meyer, Schaible, Sickler, Sorvaag, Thomas, Wanzek

Discussion Topics:

- Century Code
- K-12 Funding
- Breakfast and Lunch School Meals
- Tax Relief

6:31 p.m. Representative Nathe proposed amendments.

6:34 p.m. Representative Stemen moved to amend public charter school from line eight to line 11, change maximum to applicable, and add the word applicable line seven.

6:34 p.m. Representative Bosch seconded the motion.

6:34 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigesaa	Y
Representative Bert Anderson	Y
Representative Mike Berg	Y
Representative Glenn Bosch	Y
Representative Mike Brandenburg	Y
Representative Jay Fisher	Y
Representative Zachary Ista	Y
Representative Keith Kempenich	Y
Representative Scott Louser	Y
Representative Bob Martinson	Y
Representative Lisa Meier	AB
Representative Alisa Mitskog	Y
Representative David Monson	Y
Representative Eric Murphy	Y
Representative Mike Nathe	Y
Representative Jon Nelson	Y

Representative Brandy Pyle	Y
Representative David Richter	Y
Representative Mark Sanford	Y
Representative Greg Stemen	Y
Representative Steve Swiontek	Y
Representative Scott Wagner	Y
Representative Jonathan Warrey	Y

6:34 p.m. Motion passed 22-0-1.

6:34 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Randy Burckhard	AB
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Cole Conley	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	Y
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	AB
Senator Robert Erbele	Y
Senator Jeff Magrum	Y
Senator Tim Mathern	Y
Senator Scott Meyer	Y
Senator Donald Schaible	Y
Senator Jonathan Sickler	Y
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	Y
Senator Paul Thomas	Y
Senator Terry Wanzek	Y

6:34 p.m. Motion passed 14-0-2

6:36 p.m. Senator Magrum introduced amendment LC #25.1395.03004, #45465 and submitted testimony #45466.

6:45 p.m. Senator Magrum moved amendment LC #25.1395.03004.

6:46 p.m. Senator Meyer seconded the motion.

6:56 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigesaa	N
Representative Bert Anderson	N
Representative Mike Berg	N
Representative Glenn Bosch	N
Representative Mike Brandenburg	N
Representative Jay Fisher	N
Representative Zachary Ista	N
Representative Keith Kempenich	N
Representative Scott Louser	N
Representative Bob Martinson	N
Representative Lisa Meier	AB

Representative Alisa Mitskog	N
Representative David Monson	N
Representative Eric Murphy	N
Representative Mike Nathe	N
Representative Jon Nelson	N
Representative Brandy Pyle	N
Representative David Richter	N
Representative Mark Sanford	N
Representative Greg Stemen	N
Representative Steve Swiontek	N
Representative Scott Wagner	N
Representative Jonathan Warrey	N

6:56 p.m. Motion failed 0-22-1.

6:56 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	N
Senator Randy Burckhard	AB
Senator Sean Cleary	N
Senator Cole Conley	N
Senator Kyle Davison	N
Senator Dick Dever	N
Senator Michael Dwyer	AB
Senator Robert Erbele	N
Senator Jeff Magrum	Y
Senator Tim Mathern	N
Senator Scott Meyer	Y
Senator Donald Schaible	N
Senator Jonathan Sickler	N
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	N
Senator Paul Thomas	N
Senator Terry Wanzek	N

6:56 p.m. Motion failed 2-12-2.

6:58 p.m. Representative Stemen moved a Do Pass as amended.

6:58 p.m. Senator Davis seconded the motion.

7:24 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigasaa	N
Representative Bert Anderson	N
Representative Mike Berg	Y
Representative Glenn Bosch	Y
Representative Mike Brandenburg	Y
Representative Jay Fisher	N
Representative Zachary Ista	Y
Representative Keith Kempenich	Y
Representative Scott Louser	Y

Representative Bob Martinson	Y
Representative Lisa Meier	AB
Representative Alisa Mitskog	Y
Representative David Monson	N
Representative Eric Murphy	N
Representative Mike Nathe	Y
Representative Jon Nelson	Y
Representative Brandy Pyle	Y
Representative David Richter	Y
Representative Mark Sanford	Y
Representative Greg Stemen	Y
Representative Steve Swiontek	Y
Representative Scott Wagner	Y
Representative Jonathan Warrey	Y

7:24 p.m. Motion failed 17-5-1.

7:24 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Randy Burckhard	AB
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Cole Conley	N
Senator Kyle Davison	Y
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	AB
Senator Robert Erbele	N
Senator Jeff Magrum	N
Senator Tim Mathern	Y
Senator Scott Meyer	N
Senator Donald Schaible	Y
Senator Jonathan Sickler	N
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	Y
Senator Paul Thomas	N
Senator Terry Wanzek	N

7:24 p.m. Motion failed 7-7-2.

7:26 p.m. Representative Murphy moved a Do Not Pass as amended.

7:26 p.m. Senator Magrum seconded the motion.

7:27 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigasaa	Y
Representative Bert Anderson	Y
Representative Mike Berg	N
Representative Glenn Bosch	N
Representative Mike Brandenburg	N
Representative Jay Fisher	Y
Representative Zachary Ista	N

Representative Keith Kempenich	N
Representative Scott Louser	N
Representative Bob Martinson	N
Representative Lisa Meier	AB
Representative Alisa Mitskog	N
Representative David Monson	Y
Representative Eric Murphy	Y
Representative Mike Nathe	N
Representative Jon Nelson	N
Representative Brandy Pyle	N
Representative David Richter	N
Representative Mark Sanford	N
Representative Greg Stemen	N
Representative Steve Swiontek	N
Representative Scott Wagner	N
Representative Jonathan Warrey	N

7:27 p.m. Motion failed 5-17-1.

7:27 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	N
Senator Randy Burckhard	AB
Senator Sean Cleary	N
Senator Cole Conley	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	N
Senator Dick Dever	N
Senator Michael Dwyer	AB
Senator Robert Erbele	Y
Senator Jeff Magrum	Y
Senator Tim Mathern	N
Senator Scott Meyer	Y
Senator Donald Schaible	N
Senator Jonathan Sickler	Y
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	N
Senator Paul Thomas	Y
Senator Terry Wanzek	Y

7:27 p.m. Motion failed 7-7-2.

7:32 p.m. Senator Cleary moved a Without Recommendation.

7:32 p.m. Senator Thomas seconded the motion.

7:36 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigesaa	Y
Representative Bert Anderson	Y
Representative Mike Berg	Y
Representative Glenn Bosch	Y
Representative Mike Brandenburg	Y

Representative Jay Fisher	Y
Representative Zachary Ista	Y
Representative Keith Kempenich	N
Representative Scott Louser	Y
Representative Bob Martinson	N
Representative Lisa Meier	AB
Representative Alisa Mitskog	N
Representative David Monson	Y
Representative Eric Murphy	Y
Representative Mike Nathe	Y
Representative Jon Nelson	N
Representative Brandy Pyle	N
Representative David Richter	N
Representative Mark Sanford	N
Representative Greg Stemen	Y
Representative Steve Swiontek	N
Representative Scott Wagner	Y
Representative Jonathan Warrey	Y

7:36 p.m. Motion passed 14-8-1

7:36 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Randy Burckhard	AB
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Cole Conley	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	Y
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	AB
Senator Robert Erbele	Y
Senator Jeff Magrum	Y
Senator Tim Mathern	N
Senator Scott Meyer	Y
Senator Donald Schaible	Y
Senator Jonathan Sickler	Y
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	Y
Senator Paul Thomas	Y
Senator Terry Wanzek	Y

7:36 p.m. Motion passed 13-1-2.

7:37 p.m. Representative Nathe and Senator Schaible will carry the bill.

7:38 p.m. Recess

8:22 p.m. Co-Chairman Vigesaa re-convened the meeting.

8:23 p.m. Senator Burckhard moved to Reconsider the Without Recommendation.

8:24 p.m. Representative Martinson seconded the motion.

8:24 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigesaa	Y
Representative Bert Anderson	Y
Representative Mike Berg	Y
Representative Glenn Bosch	Y
Representative Mike Brandenburg	Y
Representative Jay Fisher	Y
Representative Zachary Ista	Y
Representative Keith Kempenich	Y
Representative Scott Louser	Y
Representative Bob Martinson	Y
Representative Lisa Meier	AB
Representative Alisa Mitskog	Y
Representative David Monson	N
Representative Eric Murphy	Y
Representative Mike Nathe	Y
Representative Jon Nelson	Y
Representative Brandy Pyle	Y
Representative David Richter	Y
Representative Mark Sanford	Y
Representative Greg Stemen	Y
Representative Steve Swiontek	Y
Representative Scott Wagner	Y
Representative Jonathan Warrey	Y

8:24 p.m. Motion passed 21-1-1.

8:24 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Randy Burckhard	Y
Senator Sean Cleary	N
Senator Cole Conley	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	Y
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	AB
Senator Robert Erbele	Y
Senator Jeff Magrum	N
Senator Tim Mathern	N
Senator Scott Meyer	Y
Senator Donald Schaible	Y
Senator Jonathan Sickler	Y
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	Y
Senator Paul Thomas	Y
Senator Terry Wanzek	Y

8:24 p.m. Motion passed 12-3-1.

8:27 p.m. Representative Martinson Moved Do Pass as Amended.

8:27 p.m. Representative Bosch seconded the motion.

8:27 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigesaa	N
Representative Bert Anderson	N
Representative Mike Berg	Y
Representative Glenn Bosch	Y
Representative Mike Brandenburg	Y
Representative Jay Fisher	N
Representative Zachary Ista	Y
Representative Keith Kempenich	Y
Representative Scott Louser	Y
Representative Bob Martinson	Y
Representative Lisa Meier	AB
Representative Alisa Mitskog	Y
Representative David Monson	N
Representative Eric Murphy	N
Representative Mike Nathe	Y
Representative Jon Nelson	Y
Representative Brandy Pyle	Y
Representative David Richter	Y
Representative Mark Sanford	Y
Representative Greg Stemen	Y
Representative Steve Swiontek	Y
Representative Scott Wagner	Y
Representative Jonathan Warrey	Y

8:27 p.m. Motion passed 17-5-1.

8:27 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Randy Burckhard	Y
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Cole Conley	N
Senator Kyle Davison	Y
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	AB
Senator Robert Erbele	N
Senator Jeff Magrum	N
Senator Tim Mathern	Y
Senator Scott Meyer	N
Senator Donald Schaible	Y
Senator Jonathan Sickler	N
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	Y
Senator Paul Thomas	N
Senator Terry Wanzek	N

8:27 p.m. Motion passed 8-7-1.

Joint Appropriations Committee

HB 1624

01/21/2026

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8:29 p.m. Representative Nathe and Senator Schaible will carry the bill.

8:30 p.m. Co-Chairman Vigesaa closed the meeting.

Krystal Eberle, Committee Clerk

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

VC
1/21/26
1 of 3

HOUSE BILL NO. 1624

Introduced by

Representatives Nathe, Heinert, Jonas, Martinson, Novak, Richter, Stemen, Conmy

Senators Axtman, Schaible, Roers, Bekkedahl

- 1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact two new sections to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota
2 Century Code, relating to offering school breakfast and lunch at no cost and the school meals
3 fund; to provide an appropriation; to provide for a transfer; and to provide an effective date.

4 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

- 5 **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code is created
6 and enacted as follows:

7 **School breakfast and lunch - Provided at no cost - State reimbursement.**

- 8 1. A public school district, ~~and public school, and public charter school~~ shall provide one
9 breakfast and one lunch each school day to an enrolled student, upon request of the
10 student, at no cost to the student or the student's parent or guardian.
11 2. A nonpublic school, tribal school, ~~public charter school~~, and school funded by the
12 bureau of Indian education may provide one breakfast and one lunch each school day
13 to an enrolled student, upon request of the student, at no cost to the student or the
14 student's parent or guardian.
15 3. To be eligible for reimbursement under subsection 4 for the provision of breakfasts and
16 lunches under subsection 1 or 2, a school district or school shall:
17 a. Participate in an applicable child nutrition program and food distribution program,
18 as defined under chapter 15.1-35; and
19 b. Encourage the parent or guardian of a student to apply for free or reduced price
20 school meals.

- 1 4. The superintendent of public instruction shall reimburse an eligible school district and
2 school for the difference between:
- 3 a. The ~~maximum~~ applicable federal reimbursement rates for lunches and breakfasts,
4 as annually adjusted and published by the United States department of
5 agriculture, multiplied by the number of lunches and breakfasts served,
6 respectively; and
- 7 b. The amount of applicable federal reimbursement actually received for providing
8 breakfasts and lunches.
- 9 5. If the United States department of agriculture does not publish the maximum federal
10 reimbursement rates, the superintendent of public instruction shall choose an
11 alternative equivalent inflationary measure to adjust the maximum federal
12 reimbursement rate under subsection 4.
- 13 6. The superintendent of public instruction may adopt rules to ensure timely
14 implementation of this section.
- 15 7. Other laws may be enacted and rules may be adopted to facilitate, safeguard, or
16 implement this section, but not to hamper, restrict, or impair it. If a conflict exists
17 between any provision of this section and any other provision of state law, the
18 provisions of this section control. This section must be construed liberally to fulfill its
19 purposes.

20 **SECTION 2.** A new section to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code is created
21 and enacted as follows:

22 **School meals fund.**

23 There is created in the state treasury the school meals fund. The fund consists of all
24 moneys transferred from the strategic investment and improvements fund and transfers from
25 other funds as authorized by the legislative assembly. Moneys in the fund may be spent
26 pursuant to legislative appropriations for providing school breakfast and lunch at no cost to
27 students or their parents or guardians.

28 **SECTION 3. APPROPRIATION - SCHOOL MEALS FUND - SUPERINTENDENT OF**
29 **PUBLIC INSTRUCTION - SCHOOL MEALS.** There is appropriated out of any moneys in the
30 school meals fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of \$65,000,000, or
31 so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the superintendent of public instruction for the

1 purpose of providing school breakfast and lunch at no cost to students or their parents or
2 guardians, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

3 **SECTION 4. TRANSFER - STRATEGIC INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENTS FUND TO**

4 **SCHOOL MEALS FUND.** During the period beginning with the effective date of this Act, and
5 ending June 30, 2027, the office of management and budget shall transfer the sum of
6 \$65,000,000 from the strategic investment and improvements fund to the school meals fund.

7 **SECTION 5. EFFECTIVE DATE.** This Act becomes effective on July 1, 2026.

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1624**

Joint Appropriations Committee (Rep. Vigesaa, Co-Chairman) recommends **AMENDMENTS** ([25.1395.03007](#)) and when so amended, recommends **DO PASS** (17 YEAS, 5 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1624 was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar.

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1624**

Joint Appropriations Committee (Sen. Bekkedahl, Co-Chairman) recommends **AMENDMENTS** ([25.1395.03007](#)) and when so amended, recommends **DO PASS** (8 YEAS, 7 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1624 was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.

25.1395.03004
Title.

Prepared by the Legislative Council
staff for Senator Magrum
January 21, 2026

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

HOUSE BILL NO. 1624

Introduced by

Representatives Nathe, Heinert, Jonas, Martinson, Novak, Richter, Stemen, Conmy

Senators Axtman, Schaible, Roers, Bekkedahl

1 A BILL ~~for an Act to create and enact two new sections to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota~~
2 ~~Century Code, relating to offering school breakfast and lunch at no cost and the school meals~~
3 ~~fund; to provide an appropriation; to provide for a transfer; and to provide an effective date for~~
4 ~~an Act to amend and reenact subsection 1 of section 57-02-08.9 of the North Dakota Century~~
5 ~~Code, relating to the primary residence credit; to provide an appropriation; to provide for a~~
6 ~~transfer; and to provide an effective date.~~

7 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

8 ~~— **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code is created~~
9 ~~and enacted as follows:~~

10 ~~— **School breakfast and lunch -- Provided at no cost -- State reimbursement.**~~

11 ~~— 1. A public school district, public school, and public charter school shall provide one~~
12 ~~breakfast and one lunch each school day to an enrolled student, upon request of the~~
13 ~~student, at no cost to the student or the student's parent or guardian.~~

14 ~~— 2. A nonpublic school, tribal school, and school funded by the bureau of Indian education~~
15 ~~may provide one breakfast and one lunch each school day to an enrolled student,~~
16 ~~upon request of the student, at no cost to the student or the student's parent or~~
17 ~~guardian.~~

18 ~~— 3. To be eligible for reimbursement under subsection 4 for the provision of breakfasts and~~
19 ~~lunches under subsection 1 or 2, a school district or school shall:~~

1 ~~_____ a. Participate in an applicable child nutrition program and food distribution program,~~
2 ~~as defined under chapter 15.1-35; and~~

3 ~~_____ b. Encourage the parent or guardian of a student to apply for free or reduced price~~
4 ~~school meals;~~

5 ~~_____ 4. The superintendent of public instruction shall reimburse an eligible school district and~~
6 ~~school for the difference between:~~

7 ~~_____ a. The maximum federal reimbursement rates for lunches and breakfasts, as~~
8 ~~annually adjusted and published by the United States department of agriculture,~~
9 ~~multiplied by the number of lunches and breakfasts served, respectively; and~~

10 ~~_____ b. The amount of federal reimbursement actually received for providing breakfasts~~
11 ~~and lunches;~~

12 ~~_____ 5. If the United States department of agriculture does not publish the maximum federal~~
13 ~~reimbursement rates, the superintendent of public instruction shall choose an~~
14 ~~alternative equivalent inflationary measure to adjust the maximum federal~~
15 ~~reimbursement rate under subsection 4.~~

16 ~~_____ 6. The superintendent of public instruction may adopt rules to ensure timely~~
17 ~~implementation of this section.~~

18 ~~_____ 7. Other laws may be enacted and rules may be adopted to facilitate, safeguard, or~~
19 ~~implement this section, but not to hamper, restrict, or impair it. If a conflict exists~~
20 ~~between any provision of this section and any other provision of state law, the~~
21 ~~provisions of this section control. This section must be construed liberally to fulfill its~~
22 ~~purposes.~~

23 ~~_____ **SECTION 2.** A new section to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code is created~~
24 ~~and enacted as follows:~~

25 ~~_____ **School meals fund.**~~

26 ~~_____ There is created in the state treasury the school meals fund. The fund consists of all~~
27 ~~moneys transferred from the strategic investment and improvements fund and transfers from~~
28 ~~other funds as authorized by the legislative assembly. Moneys in the fund may be spent~~
29 ~~pursuant to legislative appropriations for providing school breakfast and lunch at no cost to~~
30 ~~students or their parents or guardians.~~

~~SECTION 3. APPROPRIATION -- SCHOOL MEALS FUND -- SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION -- SCHOOL MEALS.~~ There is appropriated out of any moneys in the school meals fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of \$65,000,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the superintendent of public instruction for the purpose of providing school breakfast and lunch at no cost to students or their parents or guardians, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

~~SECTION 4. TRANSFER -- STRATEGIC INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENTS FUND TO SCHOOL MEALS FUND.~~ During the period beginning with the effective date of this Act, and ending June 30, 2027, the office of management and budget shall transfer the sum of \$65,000,000 from the strategic investment and improvements fund to the school meals fund.

~~SECTION 5. EFFECTIVE DATE.~~ This Act becomes effective on July 1, 2026.

SECTION 1. AMENDMENT. Subsection 1 of section 57-02-08.9 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

1. A taxpayer is entitled to a credit against the property tax due on the taxpayer's parcel of primary residential property as provided in this section. The credit:
 - a. Is limited to ~~one thousand six hundred~~ **two thousand fifty** dollars.
 - b. May not reduce the liability for special assessments levied upon any property.
 - c. May not exceed the amount of property tax due against the parcel of primary residential property.
 - d. Must be applied to reduce the property tax owed on the parcel of primary residential property after other exemptions or credits under this chapter have been applied.

SECTION 2. APPROPRIATION - LEGACY PROPERTY TAX RELIEF FUND - TAX COMMISSIONER - PRIMARY RESIDENCE CREDIT. There is appropriated out of any moneys in the legacy property tax relief fund, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of \$65,000,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the tax commissioner for the state reimbursement under the primary residence credit for the period beginning with the effective date of this Act and ending June 30, 2027. If the tax commissioner anticipates expenditures will exceed the combined amount appropriated under this section and under section 29 of chapter 555 of the 2025 Session Laws, the tax commissioner may use unspent funding appropriated in the homestead tax credit line item or the disabled veterans' credit line item in House Bill No. 1006,

1 as approved by the sixty-ninth legislative assembly, to provide any additional funding needed for
2 the primary residence credit and shall request a deficiency appropriation from the seventieth
3 legislative assembly for any remaining amount needed for the primary residence credit. The tax
4 commissioner shall report to the office of management and budget and the legislative council
5 any amounts used from the homestead tax credit and disabled veterans' credit line items for the
6 primary residence credit.

7 **SECTION 3. TRANSFER - STRATEGIC INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENTS FUND TO**
8 **LEGACY PROPERTY TAX RELIEF FUND.** No earlier than January 1, 2027, the office of
9 management and budget shall transfer the sum of \$65,000,000 from the strategic investment
10 and improvements fund to the legacy property tax relief fund for the period beginning with the
11 effective date of this Act and ending June 30, 2027.

12 **SECTION 4. EFFECTIVE DATE.** This Act is effective for taxable years beginning after
13 December 31, 2025.

Good Day Chairman and committee members.

I am Senator Jeff Magrum serving District 8.

I am proposing a Hog House amendment to HB1624.

Right now 150,000 households are estimated to benefit from the primary residence property tax credit.

Up from 145,000 households. The increase is due to new homes coming into the system as well as homeowners that didn't apply for the primary residence property tax credit.

150,000 primary residence's with an additional \$433 per residence added to the Legacy property relief fund (54-27-33) from the SIIF Fund would be equal to \$64,950,000. This sum is almost identical to the free lunch proposal of a 65 million appropriation. Right now there are approximately 50,000 residents that pay no property taxes . This amendment would increase that number to approximately 60,000 residents'.

This Amendment looks long term and is not discriminatory. The Amendment also aligns with our goal of zero property taxes, which benefits everyone equally whether they have children in school or not.

The goal of the free lunch proposal is to supersede a potential Initiative to force the state to provide a free lunch for all children. If we pass HB1624 it will likely never be removed from law. Nines states have a statewide free lunch program. Including California, Illinois, Michigan, Vermont, Maine, New Mexico, Minnesota, Massachusetts and Colorado. We should not let a political organization attempt to bully us into doing their work with polls that in my opinion are not accurate. This amendment helps build wealth for all primary residence owners to benefit all children.

The Amendment that I am proposing continues our mission of reducing and eventually eliminating primary residence property taxes. After all there's no place like home.

Thanks so much and I stand for questions