

2026 JOINT APPROPRIATIONS

HB 1627

2026 JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee
Brynhild Haugland Room, State Capitol

HB 1627
1/21/2026

A BILL for an Act to provide an appropriation to the department of public instruction to provide school meals at no cost to eligible students; and to provide an effective date.

2:19 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:

- Federal Poverty Guidelines
- Federal School Meal Reimbursement

2:20 p.m. Representative Ty Dressler introduced the bill, answered questions and submitted testimony #45462 in favor.

2:38 p.m. Lynelle Johnson, Director of Child Nutrition and Food Distribution, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, answered questions.

Additional written testimony:

Doug Sharbono, Citizen, submitted testimony in opposition #45427.

Tanya Jokerst, Constituent, submitted testimony in favor #45448.

Michelle Clouse, Principal, St. Joseph Catholic School, submitted testimony in favor #45450.

2:41 p.m. Co-Chair Vigesaa closed the meeting.

Krystal Eberle, Committee Clerk

**Do Not Pass Testimony
of Doug Sharbono, citizen of North Dakota
on HB1627
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 HB1627 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 not 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 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 1627 a Do Not Pass.

Thank you,

Doug Sharbono
1708 9th St S
Fargo, ND 58103

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



North Dakota House of Representatives

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Representative Ty Dressler

District 36
8872 38th Street SW
Richardton, ND 58652-9305
tdressler@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Finance and Taxation
Transportation

January 21, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairs Bekkedahl and Vigasaa and members of the Joint Appropriations Committee. My name is Representative Ty Dressler from District 36 in Richardton.

Last summer and fall I set out to look for improvements and efficiencies in North Dakota's school lunch program. During and after last session, it was evident the subject of school lunches was a source of public debate and many of us felt this topic needed further review.

The very simple purpose of House Bill 1627 is to increase the State-funded school lunch program qualifications to 300% of poverty level, from the current 225% level. I thought the information gathered was worthy of your time and consideration as we look at all the options going forward, whether that be by ballot measure or legislation.

Current poverty level as designated by the Federal Government is a household income of \$32,150 for a family of four. The Federal rate for free lunches is 130% of that number, or around \$42,000, and the reduced lunch rate is around \$59,000 of income. Those reduced rate lunch recipients then receive the State 225 program funds to get to a no-cost status, as do other students up to \$72,000 of household income. This is the current program we are using in ND, and the 69th Assembly appropriated \$6MM in the last regular session.

Increasing the state-subsidized program to 300% of Federal poverty level would take that income threshold to \$96,450 for a family of four. One estimate from the ND Department of Public Instruction showed the 225% level to encompass approximately 2,972 additional students of the approximately 125,000 students in North Dakota that are able to be considered for free or reduced lunches (meaning those that are not homeschooled). The same estimate exercise from the DPI shows an additional 2,300 students could be added for each additional 25% raise in the percentage of poverty level, meaning that by increasing the level to 300% we should gain approximately 7,000 to 7,500 students receiving the state dollars.

North Dakota receives about \$38MM per school year for the approximately 38,000 ND students who qualify for federal meal reimbursement. Around 26,000 of those students DIRECTLY qualify due to participation in other programs such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition

Assistance Program). This means they don't need to fill out any additional forms. If the State were to change to an unlimited income program, we'd need to make sure we still capitalize on the Federal dollars for those who don't automatically qualify.

I believe a more comprehensive look at how the Free and Reduced Meal program is administered is in order, no matter how we proceed in the next few days. It is critical that we, as a state, maximize the federal funding available, preserving as many state dollars as possible. A local school in my district has 18% participation in the program, but the local liaison believes it should be much higher. Perhaps we can use state employees or other local organizations to help enroll and verify applicants. Do we need more staffing at DPI or dedicated funding for promotion of the current Federal and State options? Can we make the online sign-up easier, more streamlined, and more efficient? This is all work for the interim and for the next regular session, however.

This bill represents a very simple, yet cost-effective, targeted, and budget-friendly approach to providing school meals to those who really need the help. It presents an alternative for the voting public when considering the proposed measure. I believe the current policies in place are doing a great job of feeding our students and with a few minor tweaks in administration, we can even increase participation and positive outcomes.

In talking with many legislators in both chambers, many have said they support this idea whole-heartedly as good policy. We, as a body need to decide, is good policy enough and then go to work educating the public? Are we willing to gamble under the threat of a measure changing our State Constitution and mandating funding?

Thanks for your consideration,

Ty Dressler

D36

2026 JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee Brynhild Haugland Room, State Capitol

HB 1627
1/21/2026

A BILL for an Act to provide an appropriation to the department of public instruction to provide school meals at no cost to eligible students; and to provide an effective date.

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

Members present: Co-Chairman Vigesaa, Representatives: Anderson, Berg, Bosch, Brandenburg, Fisher, Ista, Kempenich, Louser, Martinson, Meier, Motskog, 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:

- Federal Poverty Guidelines
- Federal School Meal Reimbursement

8:30 p.m. Representative Kempenich moved Do Pass.

8:30 p.m. Representative Monson seconded the motion.

8:31 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	Y
Representative Keith Kempenich	Y
Representative Scott Louser	N
Representative Bob Martinson	N
Representative Lisa Meier	AB
Representative Alisa Motskog	Y
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

8:31 p.m. Motion Failed 3-19-1.

8:31 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Randy Burckhard	N
Senator Sean Cleary	N
Senator Cole Conley	N
Senator Kyle Davison	N
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	N
Senator Jonathan Sickler	N
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	N
Senator Paul Thomas	N
Senator Terry Wanzenk	Y

8:31 p.m. Motion failed 6-9-1.

8:33 p.m. Senator Cleary Moved Do Not Pass.

8:34 p.m. Senator Davison seconded the motion.

8:34 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	N
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	
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8:34 p.m. Motion failed 20-2-1

8:34 p.m. Roll Call Vote

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

8:34 p.m. Motion failed 7-8-1

8:36 p.m. Representative Monson moved Without Committee Recommendation.

8:36 p.m. Senator Magrum seconded the motion.

8:37 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	N
Representative Lisa Meier	AB
Representative Alisa Mitskog	N
Representative David Monson	Y
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	Y
Representative Jonathan Warrey	N

8:37 p.m. Motion passed 12-10-1.

8:37 p.m. Roll Call Vote

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Randy Burkhard	Y
Senator Sean Cleary	N
Senator Cole Conley	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	N
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	AB
Senator Robert Erbele	Y
Senator Jeff Magrum	Y
Senator Tim Matherm	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

8:37 p.m. Motion passed 12-3-1.

8:37 p.m. Representative Murphy and Senator Sorvaag will carry the bill.

8:40 p.m. Co-Chair Vigesaa closed the meeting.

Krystal Eberle, Committee Clerk

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1627 ([25.1417.01000](#))**

Joint Appropriations Committee (Rep. Vigesaa, Co-Chairman) recommends the measure **BE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR WITHOUT RECOMMENDATION** (12 YEAS, 10 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1627 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1627 ([25.1417.01000](#))**

Joint Appropriations Committee (Sen. Bekkedahl, Co-Chairman) recommends the measure **BE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR WITHOUT RECOMMENDATION** (12 YEAS, 3 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1627 was placed on the Fourteenth order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.