

April 1, 2025

Dear Representatives,

The Hunger-Free Schools campaign is writing to express our concern over HF 2201, which would roll back universal meals by adding an income limit to the Free School Meal Program for all students in Minnesota.

The Free School Meals program in its current form is critical to ensuring that our schools are hunger-free, and has eliminated stigma from lunchrooms, reduced the paperwork strain on Minnesotan families and schools, and improved food security for the growing number of families struggling to put food on the table at home.

Providing free school meals to all students has paid dividends in terms of our educational outcomes. Studies show that school meal participation lessens the achievement gap and allows students to focus on what really matters when they're at school – learning. In a recent survey of parents across Minnesota, 52% noted that free school meals have contributed to their child attending school regularly, 47% said they are doing better in school, and 46% said it has contributed to their feeling of belonging.

Parents and students alike have shared how much this program means to them. One parent reflected on its impact on their family's household budget, ***"Even though we are a middle class family, we still live paycheck to paycheck. Not having to worry about paying for school meals is a big help."*** A student emphasized how it supports families in need, sharing, *"I think it saves kids from feeling maybe embarrassed or families that don't... meet the exact like cut off... because they make a little too much money, but they're still struggling to get by. I think I think it really helps."*

Providing free school meals to all students is an investment in Minnesota's future. It supports student success, working parents, teachers and nutrition staff, and strengthens our state's foundation for a solid and sustainable future.

We urge you to continue to provide the sustenance our students need today to be the healthy, thriving leaders of tomorrow.

Sincerely,

The Hunger Free Schools Coalition



Advocates for Better Health  
Allina Health  
American Diabetes  
Association  
Appetite for Change  
Blue Cross and Blue Shield  
of Minnesota  
Cargill  
Children's Minnesota  
EdAllies  
Education Minnesota  
Every Meal

Food Research and Action  
Center (FRAC)  
General Mills  
Land O'Lakes  
Land Stewardship Project  
Local Public Health  
Association  
MAZON  
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid  
Minnesota Academy of  
Nutrition and Dietetics  
Minnesota Business Coalition

for Racial Equity  
Minnesota Farmers Union  
Minnesota School Social  
Workers Association  
Multicultural Autism Action  
Network  
Second Harvest Heartland  
SEIU 284  
Share Our Strength  
Taher Inc.  
The Food Group  
Youthprise





March 31, 2025

Mr. Chair, Madame Chair and Members of the House Education Finance Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Minnesota School Nutrition Association to express our opposition to HF2201. While we support efforts to ensure access to nutritious options for students, we have significant concerns regarding the proposed legislation, particularly its impact on school nutrition programs and the administrative challenges it would create.

First and foremost, HF2201 would impose administrative hardships on school nutrition departments. The requirement for every family to fill out an application significantly increases the workload for nutrition staff and would necessitate hiring additional administrative personnel to process these applications. This increased administrative burden diverts valuable resources away from providing nutritious meals to students.

Furthermore, there is a risk that families who do not fully understand the change could inadvertently accrue lunch debt. The confusion and stress this may cause can negatively impact students' overall dining experience. We believe that school meal programs should focus on creating a welcoming and stress-free environment for students, rather than introducing complexities that could cause undue stress.

Additionally, this bill has the potential to fundamentally alter the atmosphere of the school dining experience. Students may feel pressured or singled out due to their family not filling out the application for educational benefits, potentially creating unintended social dynamics among students. We believe that these are adult concerns that should not be placed on the shoulders of young learners.

In light of these considerations, we respectfully urge the committee to reconsider the provisions of HF2201. Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Emily Malone  
President  
MSNA

Darcy Stueber  
Public Policy Chair  
MSNA

Margaret Winchell  
Executive Director  
MSNA



## MINNESOTA CHAPTER

Chair Ron Kresha  
Chair Cheryl Youakim  
Education Finance  
April 1, 2025



Chairs Kresha, Youakim, and Education Finance Committee Members,

On behalf of the MN School Social Workers Association (MSSWA) and the National Association of Social Workers, MN Chapter (NASW-MN), we are writing about concerns regarding HF2201.

NASW-MN is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in our state, representing 2000 social workers, and MSSWA is a professional group serving over 700 members to advance the practice of school social work in MN. Collectively, our organizations offer experience and expertise in children's mental health and wellness in schools.

The deep connection between proper nutrition and educational outcomes is well recognized. When students have access to regular, nutritious meals, they are better equipped to concentrate, retain information, and actively participate in class. Social workers believe this holistic support plays a pivotal role in learning success.

Providing meals in schools ensures that students' basic needs are met, which helps create an environment where children can thrive academically and socially. By removing the distinction between students who qualify for free meals and those who don't, universal programs foster inclusivity and reduce the stigma that might discourage some families from participating.

Social workers value the dignity and worth of each person. The free universal meal program is in line with our ethics which guide us to treat each student in a compassionate and respectful way.

As you make thoughtful choices to balance the state education budget, NASW-MN and MSSWA urge you to reject the means testing offered in SF2201 and instead, embrace school meals as a fundamental student need that we must provide.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Karen E. Goodenough, LGSW  
Executive Director  
NASW-MN

Julie Campanelli, LICSW  
President  
MSSWA

Christy McCoy, LICSW  
Legislative Chair  
MSSWA