



photo | Dan Koeck, for the North Dakota Monitor

A CITIZEN COALITION plans to continue pursuing a ballot measure after the North Dakota Senate voted against a bill to provide school meals to all students.

## ND Senate narrowly defeats free school meal bill

By Jeff Beach and Michael Achterling

North Dakota Monitor

A bill to provide free meals for North Dakota students failed by two votes in the state Senate on Friday, likely leaving the decision to a statewide vote.

House Bill 1624 failed in the Senate 24-22. It had passed the House 55-38 a day earlier.

The Together for Free School Meals coalition is gathering signatures to put a constitutional measure requiring that the state provide free school meals. If the petition drive is successful, the issue will be on the ballot in November.

"Providing school meals at no cost is one of the most effective, research-backed ways to strengthen academic performance, reduce stress on families, and give every child a fair shot. That's why I'm committed to helping move this forward because feeding kids isn't just good policy, it's the right thing to do for their future," Robin Nelson, chair of the measure's sponsoring committee, said in a statement after the vote.

Opponents of the

bill in both chambers argued that the money needed for free school meals could be better spent elsewhere, such as expanded property tax credits. Some argued that providing free meals is socialism and pointed to other state-supported programs that provide meals to needy families.

Senators also argued against rushing through a bill just to head off a ballot measure, even if a change in the constitution ties the hands of the Legislature.

Sen. Mark Enget, R-Powers Lake, said there is an advantage to leaving the issue up to a statewide vote.

"If we face that outcome, it is the people themselves that will need to recognize and choose to place this financial noose around their necks. They themselves will bear the burden of making a financial harmful decision that ultimately forces the state to raise taxes to cover the ever growing state budget," Enget said during the lengthy floor debate.

Supporters of the bill sought to maintain legislative control of the school lunch program and the funding it needs. They also argued it would help families with

rising costs.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Mike Nathe, R-Bismarck, would have provided \$65 million to provide free meals for the next school year. He said seeing the results of the program in the first year would help the Legislature make adjustments the next time it meets in regular session in 2027.

After the bill failed in the Senate, Nathe said he plans to sign the petition for the ballot measure.

"I have no doubt it's going to win, overwhelmingly," Nathe said.

Nathe said the bill's defeat illustrates the public criticism that lawmakers are not listening to North Dakotans.

Sen. Sean Cleary, R-Bismarck, voted in support of the school meals bill and also said he plans to sign the ballot measure petition.

"I think it's the right thing to do. That's why I supported it and that's why I support the measure," Cleary said.

Sen. Janne Myrdal, R-Edinburg, said the free meals mandate would have placed an unnecessary burden on schools, especially rural schools.

Myrdal referenced another change in

school meal policy in recent years, where students are not denied a hot lunch even if their family owes money to the school, as ensuring that students are not going hungry.

For voters on the free schools meals issue, she asked, "really know what you're voting on. You're voting on burdening yourself with taxes."

Myrdal said the bigger issue for North Dakota is how easily the state constitution can be changed by the citizen-initiated measure process that can be influenced by out-of-state interests.

She called on legislators in the next session to "please come up with things to protect the constitution."

Nelson, of Fargo, said in an interview this week the coalition is a grassroots campaign and isn't filled with outside money interests.

"This issue moved as far as it did because people organized and refused to be ignored," said Amy Jacobson, spokesperson for the coalition. "That public support isn't going away, and we're going to honor it by taking this directly to the voters."

### How lawmakers voted during the special session on a bill to provide school meals to all students, similar to a ballot measure that's circulating:

#### Yes

House: Anderson, B.; Anderson, D.; Bahl; Beltz; Berg; Bosch; Brandenburg; Brown, C.; Conmy; Davis; Dobervich; Dockter; Finley-DeVille; Foss; Grindberg; Grueneich; Hager; Hanson; Hatlestad; Heilman; Heinert; Hendrix; Holle; Ista; Jonas; Karl; Kempenich; Kiefert; Lefor; Longmuir; Marschall; Martinson; McLeod; McNally; Meier; Mitskog; Nathe; Nelson; Novak; Ostlie; Porter; Pyle; Richter; Ruby, M.; Sanford; Satrom; Schauer; Schneider; Steiner; Stemen; Swiontek; Toman; Wagner; Warrey; Weisz.

Senate: Barta; Bekkedahl; Boschee; Braunberger; Burckhard; Cleary; Davison; Dever; Hogan; Kessel; Klein; Larson; Lee; Luick; Marcellais; Mathern; Patten; Roers; Rummel; Schaible; Sorvaag; Weber.

#### No

House: Anderson, K.; Bolinske; Christianson; Dressler; Fegley; Fisher; Frelich; Hagert; Hauck; Headland; Henderson; Hoverson; Johnson, J.; Johnston, D.; Kasper; Klemm; Koppelman; Louser; Maki; Monson; Morton; Motschenbacher; Murphy; Nehring; Olson; Osowski; Rios; Rohr; Ruby, D.; Schatz; Skroch; Timmons; Tveit; VanWinkle; Vetter; Vigesaa; Vollmer; Wolff.

Senate: Beard; Boehm; Castaneda; Clemens; Conley; Cory; Dwyer; Enget; Erbele; Gerhardt; Hogue; Lemm; Magrum; Meyer; Myrdal; Paulson; Powers; Sickler; Thomas; Walen; Wanzek; Weston; Wobbe; van Oosting.

#### Absent

House: Brown, T.

Senate: Axtman



#### Bulldog Bark

Thu., Jan. 29: ABC Boys' Basketball at Home vs. Garrison, 5:00 p.m.

Fri., Jan. 30: Bus Driver Meeting, 8:15 a.m.

Sat. Jan. 31: JV Boys' Basketball Tournament, South Heart

Mon., Feb. 2: JH Boys' Basketball at Home vs. Washburn, 6:00 p.m.

Tue., Feb. 3: AB Girls' Basketball at Home vs. Grant Co./Mott, 5:00 p.m.; Bookmobile

Wed., Feb. 4: FC-CLA Star Events, Dickinson; District 8 Girls' Basketball Meeting

Feb. 5, 6 & 7: JV Girls' Basketball Tournament at Elgin

Thur., Feb. 5: AB Boys' Basketball at Wilton, 4:30 p.m.

#### Breakfast

Thur., Jan. 29: Sweet rolls, cereal, fruit, yogurt, juice, milk.

Fri., Jan. 30: Cook's choice, cereal, fruit, yo-

gurt, juice, milk.  
Mon., Feb. 2: Breakfast bowls, cereal, fruit, yogurt, juice, milk.

Tue., Feb. 3: Oatmeal, cereal, fruit, yogurt, juice, milk.

Wed., Feb. 4: Eggs & toast, cereal, fruit, yogurt, juice, milk.

Thur., Feb. 4: Muffins, cereal, fruit, yogurt, juice, milk.

#### Lunch

Thur., Jan. 29: Beef stroganoff, salad bar, fruit, veggies, milk.

Fri., Jan. 30: Tomato soup, salad bar, fruit, veggies, milk.

Mon., Feb. 2: Chicken noodle soup, sweet rolls, salad bar, fruit, veggies, milk.

Tue., Feb. 3: Sloppy joes, salad bar, fruit, veggies, milk.

Wed., Feb. 4: Tex-mex bowls, salad bar, fruit, veggies, milk.

Thur., Feb. 5: Chicken tenders, salad bar, fruit, veggies, milk.

## Flasher Fire Protection District ANNUAL MEETING

**Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026, 6:30 p.m. CT**

**Fire Hall**

**(96 2nd Ave. West, Flasher)**

On the agenda will be election of board members. The regular monthly meeting will immediately follow the conclusion of the annual meeting.

1/22, 1/29

## CALL FOR BIDS

The Flasher Public School District #39 will be accepting bids for a new activity school bus. For bus specifications, please contact the main office at 701-597-3355 for a copy. If you have any questions, contact JR Wilson, Supt. at 701-597-3355.

Bids must be received before 4:00 PM on Friday, February 6, 2026. Bids will be opened at the meeting of the Flasher Public School Board of Education on Tuesday, February 10, 2026 at 7:00 P.M. CT.

Send bids to:

**Flasher Public School**  
PO Box 267  
Flasher, ND 58535

Mark envelope "Bus Bid"

The Flasher Public School Board of Education has the right to reject any or all bids or accept such bids as they deem in the best interest of the school district.

## Flasher Ambulance Service District ANNUAL MEETING

**Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026, 6:00 p.m. CT**

**Fire Hall**

**(96 2nd Ave. West, Flasher)**

On the agenda will be election of board members. The regular monthly meeting will immediately follow the conclusion of the annual meeting.

1/22, 1/29