

Senate Education Committee
HB 1494
March 14, 2023

Dear Chairman Elkin and Committee Members,

The Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas (CHAD) is pleased to provide written testimony for HB 1494. CHAD is a non-profit membership organization serving as the primary care association for North Dakota and South Dakota.

First, I would like to share a little background on the health care organizations CHAD represents. Community health centers are non-profit, community-driven primary care clinics. Each clinic provides high-quality primary and preventive care to all individuals, with or without insurance and regardless of their ability to pay. Health centers are essential medical homes where patients find services that promote health, diagnose and treat disease, manage chronic conditions and disabilities, and overcome barriers that prevent them from getting healthy and staying healthy. Health centers in North Dakota serve approximately 26,000 primary and behavioral health care patients and nearly 13,000 dental patients.

Health centers understand that many factors contribute to a person's health status. Access to health care is certainly important, but socioeconomic factors such as access to nutritious food play a significant role. Food insecurity places individuals at increased risk for chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and kidney disease. This can lead to more significant health complications, emergency room usage, hospital stays, and readmissions.¹

Community health centers see firsthand the food and nutrition security needs across our state. In fact, preliminary screening data from North Dakota health centers show that food insecurity is the 2nd highest need across the fourteen social determinants of health. Through a partnership with the food bank, community health centers in North Dakota have distributed more than 6,700 pounds of food to patients in need over the past year. Still, the need for greater food security in communities remains.

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

¹ <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/explore-our-work/community-health-care-partnerships/>