



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**HOWE APPROVES PETITION FORMAT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL
MEASURE RELATING TO FUNDING OF SCHOOL LUNCHES**

BISMARCK, ND – North Dakota Secretary of State Michael Howe has approved the format of a petition to initiate a constitutional measure on the ballot related to funding of school lunches. Proponents now have until December 23, 2026, one year after notice of approval, to collect signatures and submit them to the Office of the Secretary of State for review.

The proposed constitutional initiative title is as follows:

This initiated measure amendment would add a new section to article VIII of the North Dakota Constitution. Under this section, all public school districts, public schools, and public charter schools are mandated to provide one free breakfast and one free lunch each school day to enrolled students; nonpublic schools, the Bureau of Indian Education schools, and other tribal schools have the option to provide the same. This section does not apply to schools of higher education. School districts and schools that provide these meals are eligible for reimbursement by the state if they maximize federal reimbursement, participate in applicable federal programs for school breakfast and lunch funding, and encourage parents and guardians to apply for free and reduced-price meals. The state shall reimburse eligible school districts and schools at one hundred percent of the current rates used by the state for free meals. This reimbursement is mandatory and shall be adjusted annually for inflation. If the legislative assembly is unable to identify a source of funds for the reimbursement, funds will be appropriated from the legacy earnings fund. Laws may be enacted to facilitate, safeguard, expand, or implement this section but not to hamper, restrict, or impair it. In the case of any conflict between provisions of this section and North Dakota law, the provisions of this section shall control.

The Office of the Secretary of State informed proponents on December 23, 2025, that they have:

- One year to circulate petitions and collect signatures from constituents in North Dakota (N.D.C.C. § 16.1-01-09(7)); and
- To submit no fewer than 31,164 valid signatures in order to be deemed sufficient to be placed on the ballot.
 - If signatures are submitted before midnight on February 9, 2026, the measure will be placed on the ballot for the June 9, 2026, primary election.
 - If signatures are submitted after February 9, 2026 and before midnight on July 6, 2026, the measure will be placed on the ballot for the November 3, 2026, general election.
 - If signatures are submitted after July 6, 2026, the measure will be placed on the ballot for the next statewide election.

To place a constitutional initiative on the ballot, a Sponsoring Committee must submit petitions containing the valid signatures of qualified North Dakota electors equal to at least 4% of the resident population of North Dakota. The state's population is determined by the federal census in effect and certified at the time the petitions are submitted.

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The Office of Secretary of State oversees a variety of functions, including elections, business registrations, licensing for certain occupations, Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) lien filings, and combative sports, as well as serving as the custodian of the Great Seal, and attesting official documents and acts of the Governor.