Thank you Madam Chair and members of the committee, my name is Mark Miazga. I am a Research Coordinator at the University of Minnesota. I am here today to urge members to support this legislation that would provide free lunch to students who are in the reduced lunch program in Minnesota. My background in health research goes back for over ten years in my current work at the University and in previous work at the Wilder Research Center in Saint Paul. There are two areas I want to focus on in my remarks. The first is research around hunger and learning and the second is costs associated with hungry children.

1)First off, the research around hunger and learning in children and adolescents is conclusive. Research done here in Minnesota and across the United States shows the following:

* Hungry kids are more likely to be sick.
* are more likely to have more severe types of sickness and be sicker for a longer period of time.
* Hungry kids miss more school.
* are more likely to struggle with mental illness and emotional problems.
* are are more likely to be suspended from school.
* are more likely to repeat a grade.
* are more likely to fall behind their peers physically, cognitively, and socially.

The long-term effects of even moderate exposure to hunger often carry over into adulthood as well. Research shows that adults who experienced hunger as children have lower levels of educational and technical skills and bring down the competitiveness level of the United States workforce. These adults are also more likely to be obese and use more health care services than their peers.

2)Researchers across the county are well aware of the short-term and long-term effects of hunger on children and adults and for these reasons alone I encourage you to support this bill. However, there is a second reason to pass this bill and that is the economic cost of hunger. Research done at Georgetown University, the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, and other organizations show that:

* Hungry kids are more likely to have behavior problems.
* are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior.
* are more likely to be involved with police, sheriffs departments, and the criminal justice system.
* are more likely to engage in substance abuse.
* are more likely to need health care services than their peers. According to economic cost estimates published in the Journal of Nutrition and the New York Academy of Sciences the average daily cost of hospitalization is $12,000 for a child stay in the hospital.

These kinds of costs along with other costs associated with law enforcement, staff time of those employed in the school district and criminal justice system as well as costs associated with property damage, loitering, shoplifting, and other delinquency crimes are already costing Minnesota a great deal of money. Passing this bill helps cut down on these expenses while also increasing the likelihood that kids currently on reduced lunch will be productive citizens as adults. I urge you to pass this bill and fill in the nutritional funding gap to help ensure Minnesota meets the needs of its’ children while also keeping a responsible eye on its’ finances.

I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional information.