



Storehouse (NI)
Temple Court
39 North Street
Belfast
BT1 1NA

02890 236 333

Education Committee
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings, Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

6th June, 2026

Re: Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill — Call for Evidence

Dear Committee Members,

We are writing to you as an organisation that works every day with families in our community who are struggling. We want to tell you why we support all clauses (clause 1, clause 2, clause 3, and clause 4) in the Holiday Meal Payments Bill and why we believe it matters.

Storehouse is a charity that seeks to develop communities that recognise the significance in everyone. We do this through Provision, Community and Growth. Provision means providing good quality essentials to those in need. Our food bank in Belfast City Centre facilitated almost 6000 visits by around 1200 households in 2025, all of whom are referred by charities and agencies in Belfast who have assessed them as having insufficient income to feed themselves and their families.

We are not here to make a political argument. We are here to tell you what we see, what the families we work with tell us, and why we believe this Bill would make a genuine difference to their lives.

What we see

School holidays are one of the hardest times of year for the families we work with. When term ends, the free school meal ends with it, and for a lot of families, that meal was the one thing they could count on. The holidays, especially the eight weeks of the summer holidays, are a long time to have to provide healthy, nutritious meals on an impossibly tight budget.

It only takes an additional cost like an extra meal per day to drive families into debt. We hear about families seeking 'help' from unregulated loans, further exacerbating the problem. We hear about parents taking the decision to skip meals, in order to make sure their children are fed. We see people coming to charities like Storehouse for help with the costs of food, many of whom for the first time, embarrassed, because they have never needed help before and do not know how to ask for it.

We also know that not everyone asks for help. Some families would rather go without than walk through our doors with their children watching. That means the true picture is worse than what we can count.

Wider issues for families

Hunger is not just about food. It is about the stress of not knowing how you are going to feed your children tomorrow. It is about children missing out on activities because there is no money left after the food shop or paying other necessary bills. It is about parents lying awake at night doing sums that do not add up. A holiday meal payment would not solve everything, but it would take one of those worries off the table.

Why this Bill matters

This Bill is one piece of a bigger puzzle. Poverty in Northern Ireland is real, it is growing, and it affects children in ways that follow them long after the holidays are over. Children who do not eat well during the holidays go back to school less ready to learn. Teachers see it. We see it. The evidence is there.

The Executive has committed to an Anti-Poverty Strategy. This Bill is exactly the kind of practical step that such a Strategy should produce. It will not end poverty. But it will mean that tens of thousands of children in Northern Ireland do not go hungry because schools are closed.

We also want to be honest about the limits of what community organisations like Storehouse can do on our own. We have been filling this gap for years, through our community meals, foodbank and other provision such as clothes and furniture. That is not a sustainable way to make sure children are fed. A statutory payment would mean families do not have to rely on whether an organisation like ours has sufficient resources to provide the support and services that families need. It would mean they could count on it.

What we are asking for

We are asking the Education Committee, the Education Minister, the NI Executive, and the NI Assembly to move the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill to its next stage and to pass all clauses without delay.

Another year without provision is another year of families struggling. And all the while prices, especially food prices, continue to rise.

We know you will hear from many organisations about this Bill. We hope what we have shared gives you a sense of what it is actually like for the families we work with. They are not asking for very much. They are asking for the reassurance that their children will not go hungry during the school holidays. We are asking you to make it happen.

Yours sincerely,



Aidan McCartney
Deputy CEO
aidan@storehousebelfast.com