

Idaho food service worker fired for giving hungry student free food worth \$1.70

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In cruel bureaucratic fashion, Dalene Bowden was fired from her job last week as a food service worker at Irving Middle School in Pocatello, Idaho just ahead of the Christmas holiday after she gave a hungry student with no money a free lunch. The total cost of the food was \$1.70.

Following the incident, Bowden was placed on unpaid leave and then received a letter days later issuing the termination of her position. In the letter, signed by Susan Petit, Director of Human Resources of Pocatello School District 25, it stated: “The reason of your termination is due to your theft-stealing [sic] school district or another’s property and inaccurate transactions when ordering, receiving, and serving food.”

According to Bowden, for the three years she has worked for the school she has never once been written up or reprimanded for her job performance. She did, however, receive a verbal warning for giving a student a free cookie. Bowden offered to pay for the \$1.70 lunch but was rejected by her supervisor.

Bowden has since launched an online funding campaign through gofundme.com to raise money for an attorney to change the law around the school’s ability to fire workers for unlawful accusations of theft.

“I admits [sic] I broke the rules, but I’m not apologizing and I would do exactly the same thing again regardless of the consequences. I was a lunch lady at Irving Middle School. I was placed on unpaid leave Tuesday after I gave a free lunch to a 12-year-old student who didn’t have money to pay for her hot lunch,” Bowden said on her fundraising page. “I love my job, I really do, This [sic] just breaks my heart, and I was in the wrong, but what do you do when the kid tells you that they’re hungry, and they don’t have any money? I handed her the tray.”

Many children throughout the US are not able to afford their school lunch. Poverty amongst children in Idaho is widespread.

In 2013, the National Center for Children in Poverty estimated 22 percent, or more than 30,000 of Idaho’s young children, below the age of 6, lived with poor families, while overall 80,467, amounting to 19 percent, of Idaho’s children lived with poor families. The federal poverty threshold for a family of four with two children in 2013 was a paltry \$23,624.

The social crisis of poverty amongst children is endemic to the entire United States. Citing a study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the WSWS wrote in February, 2015, “child poverty in America is more widespread than at any time in the last 50 years. For all the claims of economic ‘recovery’ in the United States, the reality for the new generation of the working class is one of ever-deeper social deprivation.”

Amidst ongoing cuts to social services like Food Stamps, Bowden’s firing is the ruthless expression of the state’s role in this era of social deprivation: to assure that the working class does not receive a penny more than it is allotted.



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