



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 760

Public Schools – Student Meal Programs and Meal Charge Policies

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

February 18, 2020

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Margo Quinlan, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
Job Opportunities Task Force
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Loyola University Maryland
Maryland Catholic Conference
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

Stacey Jefferson, Chair
P: 410-637-1900 ext 8578
C: 443-813-9231

E: stacey.jefferson@bhsbaltimore.org

Margo Quinlan, Co-Chair
C: 410-236-5488

E: mquinlan@familyleague.org

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports SB 760, which requires each county Board of Education to establish a meal charge policy that outlines a plan for preventing and addressing school meal debt, and prohibits actions that stigmatize students.

Maryland is one of the wealthiest states in the nation, however, nearly one in five Maryland children experience food insecurity, meaning they do not have consistent access to adequate food.¹ Two of the critical programs that address childhood hunger are the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. These school meal programs are key to ensuring that children are receiving the nutrition they need to not be distracted by hunger during the school day.

In the 2018-2019 school year, over 384,000 low-income students qualified for free or reduced-price meals across the state. While federal funding allows low income students to receive school meals at low or no cost, there are still instances when students arrive to the cafeteria without enough money to pay for their meal. While this happens for a variety of reasons, it may indicate that the family is struggling financially even if they are just above the cutoff line for free or reduced-price school meals, which especially can happen to families in states like Maryland where the cost of living is high.

Enacting strong policies can help address the root causes of this issue and prevent meal debt accumulation. The best practices laid out in SB 760, particularly the strengthening of communication between schools and households regarding meal account balances and the free and reduced-price meal application process, will help to ensure that eligible students and families are receiving the support that they need to prevent the accrual of unnecessary debt.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges a favorable report for SB 760.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

¹ Feeding America. (2015). Map the Meal Gap. http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/?_ga=1.119040777.1641925123.1423756865