

House Bill 628
Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

House Ways and Means Committee
February 22, 2023

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB 628, which expands access to school meals by providing state funds to cover the cost of school breakfast and school lunch for all students in schools participating in the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Program

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For 100 years, Catholic Charities has accompanied Marylanders as they age with dignity, obtain empowering careers, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success and feel welcome as immigrant neighbors.

As one of the largest human service providers in Maryland, we work every day with low-income families and see firsthand the challenges and difficulties families face struggling to make ends meet. We work with families across a variety of programs, including seeing students in our School-Based Behavioral Health Programs. Food insecurity is an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), and students experiencing hunger can't concentrate or learn. Ensuring that every child in the state has access to a nutritious school breakfast and lunch during the school day is a smart and effective investment in Maryland's future, and will improve the somatic and behavioral health outcomes of children.

Passing HB 628 will ensure that all students in Maryland have access to the nutrition they need to thrive. It takes the longest for those with the lowest incomes to recover from economic crises like the pandemic, but alarmingly many of the extra supports that have kept families afloat – like universal free school meals - have ended. Especially with rising costs of inflation, there are many Maryland families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs and yet do not qualify for free school meals because their income exceeds the low household income eligibility threshold. Creating a dedicated state funding source to ensure that universal free meals can be provided in all schools means that students don't lose access to critical nutritional resources. HB 628 is a smart investment for the future of our students, our communities, and the future of our State.

On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 628.

Submitted By: Regan Vaughan, Director of Advocacy