



SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 579

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION - BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PROGRAMS - UNIVERSAL EXPANSION

FEBRUARY 14, 2024

SUPPORT

Maryland CAPE is our state's chapter and one of 40 state chapters of the Council for American Private Education. Our network includes the Catholic, Christian, Evangelical Lutheran, Friends, Independent, Jewish, Lutheran, Montessori, Muslim, and Seventh Day Adventist school communities. We speak on behalf of roughly 130,000 nonpublic school students attending over one thousand nonpublic schools across our great state of Maryland.

We issue this testimony in support of Senate Bill 579.

Many of our students suffer from food insecurity. Sometimes, this may be a product of a family suffering from economic stress, while at other times it may be a result of some other issue. Regardless of the cause, food insecurity means a harder time for the student, both while in school and after dismissal. Hungry students are more likely to disturb others, making it harder for teachers to manage their classrooms effectively. And while many students do qualify for food aid, many just miss participation thresholds.

Allowing all school students to participate in school meals will help students maximize their time at school and improve physical and emotional health outcomes, help Maryland educators teach in a healthy classroom environment, and help families just above the current cut-offs who nonetheless struggle economically. Additionally, this bill can help remove the stigma that currently comes when students are singled out for participation in special meal tiers, and can help reduce the burden on school administrators in their work to process student meal programs and needs.

Student nutrition is an urgent topic, and a universal student need, whether the student attends a public or nonpublic school. We respectfully request a FAVORABLE report on Senate Bill 579.

Thank you.