



House Bill 696/Senate Bill 579
Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion
Budget & Taxation – February 14, 2024, 1 p.m.
Position: Favorable

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST serves as the backbone organization for the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools. The Maryland Coalition for Community Schools, founded in 2016, advocates for student and family success by leading the charge to expand the Community School Model in Maryland. The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) advocates for adequate funding, equitable policies, and transparent accountability statewide.

Research has been unequivocal that reducing that providing students with free meals during the school day reduces childhood hunger and supports improved behavioral and academic outcomes for students. Students and their families do not always complete the paperwork required to qualify for Free and Reduced Meals for a variety of reasons. Additionally, students who utilize free or reduced meals can be stigmatized by utilizing the program as it can signify to other students their economic status.

The only way to ensure access to meals is by providing them universally at no cost to students and families as provided in Senate Bill 579. Maryland should join the eight states that have already adopted Healthy School Meals for All policies as one step to reduce childhood hunger, improve students' learning readiness, and reduce harm/stigma created by programs technical requirements. Maryland's action may also encourage similar action at the federal level which will ultimately benefit Maryland.

We encourage the committee to provide a favorable report for SB579 and enact common sense policies that will support the state's goals to end childhood hunger and create the conditions for successful academic outcomes.

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