

Good afternoon, Chairman, and committee members;
Thank you for allowing my testimony for SB 579 Primary and Secondary Education- Breakfast and Lunch Programs- Universal Expansion.

My name is Barbara Harral. I am a registered dietitian and the retired director of Food & Nutrition Services (FNS) for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). I am representing the Maryland School Nutrition Association.

The members of the Maryland School Nutrition Association strongly support SB 579 which expands access to all students in schools that participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program through state funding.

As the front line in the school meals program, we are very aware of the students who need our meals every day. School meals provide the healthiest choices for students. These choices improve their nutrition with increased fruit, vegetables and milk.

There are immediate benefits of universal meals in the form of decreased tardiness, fewer missed days of school, and fewer health room referrals for hunger. It is important for our students to be in class and ready to learn every day. Future benefits would likely include higher graduation rates by students who attend class more regularly.

Nutrition plays a vital role in the health of our students and school meals provides the healthiest options for students. Improved nutritional status of a student would lead to better long term health outcomes.

Now is the time for us to provide this in Maryland – Our students cannot wait!

Thank you for your consideration and urge a favorable report on SB 579.