

SB579 - Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfas

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Position: FAV

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 Suburban Orthodox Congregation
 Temple Beth Shalom
 Temple Isaiah
 Zionist Organization of America
 Baltimore District

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**Senate Bill 579 – Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast
 and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion
 Budget and Taxation Committee – February 14, 2024
 SUPPORT**

Background: SB579 would alter the standards of the State Free Feeding Program, beginning in fiscal year 2025, to require that if a school participates in the federal School Breakfast Program or the National School Lunch Program, then each student in the school must be offered a meal at no cost to the student.

Written Comments: The concept of human dignity is well ingrained in Jewish teachings. We believe that all of our neighbors deserve access to the basic resources of food, clothing, and shelter. The School Breakfast and Lunch Program provides funding that makes it possible for schools to offer a nutritious school breakfast and lunch, regardless of a parent's income. Schools receive Federal funds for each breakfast served, and additional funds are provided to schools for each meal served to children who qualify, because of family income, for free or reduced-price meals.

By expanding the program beginning in FY25 and ensuring that the State will cover the remaining cost of meals outside of what the federal programs provide, we are ensuring that students who are in need of nutritious meals will be able to obtain them while at school going forward.

The Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of SB579.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies, and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.

SB 579 - Maryland Food Bank - FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Anne Wallerstedt

Position: FAV

SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion Senate Budget and Taxation Committee Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment February 14, 2024

SUPPORT

Senate Bill 579 provides breakfast and lunch to all Maryland students at no cost who attend a school that participates in the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Program.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders are at risk of food insecurity. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, including families with children and communities of color. The causes of food insecurity are complex and often include additional factors such as low income, lack of reliable transportation, and missing community resources such as grocery stores.

The economic stability of a child's family should not dictate whether they are able to eat nutritious food every day, yet for too many Marylanders this is the reality. More than 1 in 3 Maryland families making less than \$35,000 a year are considered food insufficient. However, it is not just families in the lowest income bracket who are struggling. 35.5% of all Marylanders are finding it difficult to afford their basic household necessities – including food, and more alarming is that 34.7% of Maryland families report that their children are not eating enough because food is unaffordable.

The Maryland Food Bank sees firsthand the absolute beneficial impact of meals that are served while children are at schools or other safe community centers through our Supper Club, which served over 600,000 meals at 34 sites to children after school in FY 23, and our Summer Club, which served almost 69,000 meals at 38 sites to children during the summer of 2023. Further, we operate food pantries at 189 K-12 schools across the state, where in FY 23 we distributed the equivalent of over 2.4 million meals serving approximately 48,000 Maryland families. The sheer magnitude of need is present in these programs, and the Maryland Food Bank knows that our efforts, while substantial, cannot alone solve child food insecurity in the state, as a crucial time of day for children to eat is missing – namely, breakfasts and lunches.

Maryland has a real opportunity to equitably even the education field for thousands of students who may need their schools to provide them the only healthy meals their family can afford. By providing meals to *all* students at no cost, this also removes any stigma that might be perceived and ensures that all children start the day with the same foundation of nutritious foods that can fuel their learning.

The Maryland Food Bank appreciates your consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 579.

Children's National Testimony - SB 579 - Danielle

Uploaded by: Austin Morris

Position: FAV



111 Michigan Ave NW
Washington, DC 20010-2916
ChildrensNational.org

**Testimony of Danielle Dooley, MD, MPhil
Medical Director, Community Affairs and Population Health
Children's National Hospital
before
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
IN SUPPORT OF
SB 579: Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal
Expansion**

February 14, 2024

Chairman Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of Senate Bill 579. My name is Danielle Dooley, MD, MPhil, and I am a Pediatrician and Medical Director of Community Affairs and Population Health at Children's National Hospital. Children's National has been serving the nation's children since 1870. Nearly 60% of our patients are residents of Maryland, and we maintain a network of community-based pediatric practices, surgery centers and regional outpatient centers in Maryland.

Every week in my health center, I see patients who are Maryland residents and whose families are struggling to put food on the table. Parents are working 2 or 3 jobs to make ends meet. I have heard from many families that the pandemic-era waivers that provided school meals at no cost to all students were essential for their child's functioning in school and their family's financial wellbeing.

Hungry kids cannot learn, grow and thrive. Students experiencing hunger in the classroom cannot concentrate, have lower academic performance and are at a higher risk of negative health outcomes, such as behavior issues, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and high cholesterol.¹

Universal expansion of school meals has benefits for both schools and students. On the school side, universal access to free meals reduces the administrative burden of determining student eligibility for free meals. For students, universal access to school meals has many benefits. First, it eliminates the stigma of “lunch-shaming” that students experience when they receive a free or reduced price lunch, and are noted by their peers or administrators to be different from other students. This experience and fear of stigma prevents children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals from accessing them and getting the vital nutrition they need.² In Maryland, prior to the pandemic, less than half of low-income students accessed school breakfast and school lunch daily due to barriers like cost and stigma.³ Studies have shown that implementation of universal school meals can lead to increased participation in school meals programs, improved academic performance, reduced absenteeism, and improved perceptions of the school environment.⁴ Research also shows that universal school meals also helps to lower suspension rates in schools.⁵

Children, especially those residing in Maryland that I care for in my health center, have borne the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is critical that we implement policy solutions to help mitigate the negative health effects and learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Children need and deserve every support to help them recover from the pandemic. An important step in this direction is to universally expand school breakfast and lunch programs throughout Maryland, so that all children can grow up stronger.

I applaud the Maryland General Assembly for introducing this important legislation, which will benefit Maryland’s youngest residents and their families, and request a favorable report on Senate Bill 579. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

¹ <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/136/5/e1431/33896/Promoting-Food-Security-for-All-Children?autologincheck=redirected>. Accessed February 6, 2024.

² <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/free-school-meals-stigma/#:~:text=The%20stigma%20around%20free%20school,was%20free%20for%20all%20students>. Accessed February 6, 2024.

³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1me25VJtghg3Jf_1A0rsk9qjZ7Nfc4q6s/view. Accessed February 6, 2024.

⁴ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/case-universal-free-meals-all-permanent-solution>. Accessed February 6, 2024.

⁵ <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/universal-free-school-meals-might-improve-discipline-rates-heres-how/2024/01>. Accessed February 7, 2024.

NKH MD_MD SB 0579_Statement of Support_FINAL - Wri

Uploaded by: Ayesha Holmes

Position: FAV



MARYLAND

SB0579 Testimony IN FAVOR
Ayesha B. Holmes, Maryland Director
aholmes@Strength.org

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

**Re: Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs
Universal Expansion**

February 14, 2024

Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Committee,

**No Kid Hungry Maryland writes in support of SB 0579 which proposes universal expansion of
Breakfast and Lunch in all Maryland public schools.**

Through the No Kid Hungry Maryland campaign, we work with partners, lawmakers, educators, and businesses to identify and eliminate the barriers that may prevent children and families from accessing healthy and nutritious meals.

In 2024, approximately 1 in 8 Maryland kids could face hunger this year, and programs like *Healthy School Meals for All* play a critical role in reducing food insecurity for children. In June 2022, the MD Food Bank reported that in Maryland, roughly 50% of families making less than \$35,000 are food insecure, and overall income brackets, almost 19% are facing food insecurity.¹ This data, tells us that a significant number of children in Maryland risk facing hunger this year. Instituting Healthy School Meals for all would

The policy outlined in SB 0579 would allow children across the state to access meals at no cost to them. This would decrease stigma for children who might need assistance from the Federal Nutrition Programs addressing needs for children through the Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) program. Also, this type of program will ensure that children, whose families are living just beyond the FARMS threshold, but are still food insecure, would have access as well.

No Kid Hungry Maryland encourages the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to favorably report out on SB 0579, so that more students can be served without stigma.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. Should you have any questions, or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 410-205-1016 or at aholmes@strength.org.

With Gratitude,

Ayesha B. Holmes, Director
No Kid Hungry Maryland

¹ MFB-Strategy-Group-Research-Report-Food-Insecurity-in-Maryland.pdf

testimony senate 2.14.24 Bill 579.pdf

Uploaded by: Barbara Harral

Position: FAV

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.

SB0579 - FAV - Capital Area Food Bank.pdf

Uploaded by: Brian Alexander

Position: FAV

Capital Area Food Bank
Brian Alexander, Sr. Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy
SB0579 – Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion
Budget and Taxation Committee
Hearing Date 2/14/2024 at 1pm
Testimony of SUPPORT

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

My name is Brian Alexander, and I am the Senior Manager of Advocacy and Public Policy at the Capital Area Food Bank. I write to offer our support for SB0579 to provide universal school meals to all Maryland students.

The Capital Area Food Bank has been a leader in the Washington, D.C. area's hunger relief community for more than 44 years, serving residents of Northern Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland. During our last fiscal year, we distributed nearly 29 million meals in those two Maryland counties alone through a vast network of partners and programs to help our neighbors keep food on their tables.

Each year, the Capital Area Food Bank releases a Hunger Report – a comprehensive study that looks at food insecurity across the food bank's service area. One key finding from our 2023 Hunger Report was that households with children continue to experience food insecurity at extremely high rates. Survey results revealed that more than 42% of all households with children across the region experienced food insecurity at some point during the last year, as opposed to less than 27% of households without children.

For parents and grandparents raising children and young adults in a region with a very high cost of living, budgets can easily become stretched, and data tell us that when resources are tight, food is frequently one of the first things to be cut back. According to our Hunger Report, caregivers have indicated they may skip meals or cut down on the size of their portions to stretch budgets and ensure children are fed.

In response to this need, the food bank operates out-of-school and summer meal distributions, which provide meals to children when school is out, reducing the pressure on household food budgets. However, we also know many of the families we serve rely on in-school meals, both school breakfasts and lunches, as a reliable, healthy source of food for their children.

At the height of the pandemic, the USDA provided waivers to schools across the country, allowing school meals to be served at no cost to all students. When these waivers ended, schools reverted back to previous payment structures, once again introducing the burden of school meal debt and limiting eligibility to those with annual incomes less than 185% of the

federal poverty level. As a result, many students are now no longer eligible to participate even if their families earn less than a living wage or struggle to meet their basic needs.

Students should have the food and nutrition they need to thrive during the school day, and Maryland can make this a reality for all students by joining a growing list of states prioritizing Healthy School Meals for All. We strongly encourage a favorable report on SB0579. Thank you.

MLU written testimony - SB 579 - Primary and Secon

Uploaded by: Carlos Orbe, Jr.

Position: FAV



February 13, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

SB 579 - Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

Budget and Taxation Committee:

I write to you today to urge your support for Senate Bill 579, proposed by Maryland Latinos Unidos, a coalition dedicated to supporting and uplifting Latino and immigrant communities across our state.

This bill seeks to address the critical issue of food insecurity among our Latino and immigrant populations, particularly in our schools. By amending the standards of the State Free Feeding Program, this legislation ensures that every student in participating schools, regardless of their economic status, is offered a nutritious breakfast and lunch at no cost. This includes aligning with federal programs such as the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program to meet essential nutrition standards.

Passing this bill is not just about providing meals; it's about fostering equity and justice. For too long, Latino and immigrant communities have faced disparities and inequities, exacerbating their struggles. By guaranteeing access to free meals, we are taking a crucial step towards leveling the playing field and ensuring that every child has the nourishment they need to thrive academically and physically.

Moreover, this bill aligns with our collective values of compassion and solidarity. It sends a powerful message that we stand with our Latino and immigrant neighbors, supporting their well-being and contributing to their success.

By investing in our youth through programs like universal free breakfast and lunch, we are investing in the future prosperity of our state. Healthy, well-nourished children perform better in school, have higher graduation rates, and are better positioned to contribute positively to society.

I urge you to consider the profound impact this bill can have on our communities and the future of Maryland. Let us stand together in support of Senate Bill 579 and demonstrate our commitment to equity, justice, and the well-being of all our residents.

Respectfully,
Carlos Orbe, Jr.
Communications and Public Affairs Specialist
Maryland Latinos Unidos

MD HSMFA Testimony_2.13.24.pdf

Uploaded by: Catherine Cochran

Position: FAV



Testimony on behalf of the Center for Science in the Public Interest in support of SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

Submitted by:

Catherine Cochran, MA

Policy Associate

Center for Science in the Public Interest

February 14th, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the Universal Expansion of Primary and Secondary Education Breakfast and Lunch Programs (SB 579). On behalf of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), a science-based consumer advocacy organization, I would like to take this opportunity to express our strong support for this Act. CSPI is a fierce defendant of science-based nutrition standards and has worked on school food for decades. Prior to our involvement in the passage of the federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which led to sweeping improvements in school meal nutrition, CSPI worked with state and local advocates to pass school nutrition policies across the country. Following the Trump Administration’s 2018 rule that weakened school nutrition standards, CSPI sued the Administration and won, ultimately getting their rule thrown out. CSPI also advocates for access to healthy meals for all students at the federal, state, and local levels, including involvement in approximately a dozen statewide healthy school meals for all campaigns.

With this testimony, CSPI urges a favorable report on SB 579 which aims to expand 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.

Healthy School Meals for All Provide Needed Economic Support for Families

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased federal funds and a series of child nutrition waivers allowed students nationwide to receive free breakfast and lunch, regardless of household income.^{i,ii} Despite an overwhelmingly positive response from school districts, families, and public health and education advocates, Congress allowed these pandemic waivers to expire in summer 2022.ⁱⁱⁱ Several states, including California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Vermont have since moved to ensure free access to school meals for students statewide.^{iv}

Maryland has already recognized the critical role school meals play. The Maryland Meals for Achievement program allows eligible schools to offer free breakfast in the classroom,^v and the Maryland Cares for Kids Act of 2018 ensures any child eligible for free or reduced-price meals receives a free meal.^{vi} However, even with these policies, current eligibility criteria leave far too many Marylanders behind, including lower middle-class families struggling to make ends meet. This school year, for a student to receive free meals in Maryland, their household income cannot exceed \$55,500 annually for a family of four.^{vii} Inflation is hurting families' budgets, and many cannot shoulder the costs of school meals. For those who do qualify for free meals, stigma and shame associated with qualifying prevent some students from participating.^{viii} Nowhere else during the school day do we require proof of income like we do in the cafeteria. We willingly provide books and transportation regardless of family income.

School meals, which are an invaluable opportunity to instill healthy eating habits for life, should be treated no differently.^{ix} We must close this eligibility gap in Maryland and provide free meals for all students.

Healthy School Meals for All Promote Nutrition, Food Security, and Academic Performance

A recent systematic review found that universal free school meals programs are positively associated with higher meal participation rates and in some cases, improved diet quality and academic performance, particularly when programs included free breakfast and lunch. Additionally, while studies evaluating effects on food security status were limited, the results showed a promising relationship between universal free meal programs and improved food security.^x Research shows that in 2017-2018, food consumed at school was the highest quality source of food for kids – followed by grocery stores, other sources, worksites, and restaurants.^{xi} Additionally, by negating the need to stand in line to pay for meals, healthy school meals for all allow children more time to eat their meals.

Healthy School Meals for All Advance Equity

Healthy school meals for all remove stigma for children participating in the program and provide equitable access to healthy meals. A recent report found that when all students have access to free meals, perceptions of bullying and fighting decrease outside of school and kids that previously were income-eligible for free- or reduced-priced meals felt safer inside the school, including the cafeteria.^{xii} Healthy school meals for all ensure that children who might be on the edges of eligibility, or children who are experiencing homelessness, have recently immigrated, have caregivers who may struggle with administrative paperwork, or are in foster care do not fall through the cracks.

No child deserves to be hungry at school. It's time for Maryland to make Healthy School Meals for All a priority and join the growing list of states that have guaranteed all students have access to the healthy meals they need to grow and thrive.

As such, I thank you for your consideration and urge a favorable report on SB 579.

Catherine Cochran

Catherine Cochran
Policy Associate
Center for Science in the Public Interest
cochran@cspinet.org

ⁱ Families First Coronavirus Response Act. P.L. 116-127 § 2202, 134 Stat. 185.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Child Nutrition COVID-19 Waivers*. November 8, 2022.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster-assistance/child-nutrition-covid-19-waivers#:~:text=Waiver%20to%20Allow%20Fiscal%20Action,7%207%2F6%2F22>). Accessed February 13, 2024.

ⁱⁱⁱ Keep Kids Fed Act of 2022. P.L. 117-158.

^{iv} Food Research and Action Center. *Raise Your Hand for Healthy School Meals for All*. November 2023. [Healthy School Meals for All \(frac.org\)](https://www.frac.org). Accessed February 7, 2024.

^v Maryland Hunger Solutions. *Maryland Meals for Achievement*. 2020.

<https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/federal-nutrition-programs/school-breakfast-program-sbp/maryland-meals-for-achievement/>. Accessed February 7, 2024.

^{vi} Maryland Cares for Kids Act. H.B. 315. 2018.

^{vii} Maryland State Department of Education. *Income Eligibility Guidelines (Effective July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024)*.

<https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Documents/IEG-23-24.pdf>. Accessed February 7, 2024.

^{viii} Cohen J et al. Impact of Massachusetts' Healthy School Meals for All Policy on Families. Nourish Lab at the Center for Health Inclusion, Research and Practice. June 2023.

https://www.childnourishlab.org/files/ugd/383bcd_45ee5fed8e224ffd8639f0f498086e31.pdf. Accessed February 7, 2024.

^{ix} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Eating Healthier at School*. September 19, 2022.

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/features/eating_healthier.htm#:~:text=Schools%20play%20an%20important%20role,nutrients%20like%20calcium%20and%20fiber. Accessed February 7, 2024.

^x Cohen J, et al. Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review. *Nutrients*. 2021; 13(3):911.

^{xi} Liu J, et al. Trends in Food Sources and Diet Quality Among US Children and Adults, 2003-2018. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021;4(4):e215262.

^{xiii} Gutierrez E. The Effect of Universal Free Meals on Student Perceptions of School Climate: Evidence from New York City. Pages 22, 24. June 2021. EdWorkingPaper: 21-430. Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University.

SB0579_Breakfast_and_Lunch_Programs_Expansion_MLC_

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY FOR SB0579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Bill Sponsor: Senator Guzzone

Committee: Budget and Tax

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0579 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Our members strongly support programs that provide meals to needy children at school. We believe that the Federal School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program not only help children learn by ensuring that they are not hungry at school but also save lives for children who would otherwise be malnourished.

We understand that these programs are expensive and that the state will have to make up the difference in the cost of the meals but we are very heartened that this bill will expand those programs. There are many children in these schools that do not specifically qualify for the free meals, but need them all the same. All children should be able to attend classes without being hungry. If we cannot create an environment for children to learn, we are wasting their potential and starting a cycle that will leave them in poverty.

This bill, if enacted, would require each school that participates in the Federal School Breakfast Program or the National School Lunch Program provide meals at no cost to each student in the school beginning in Fiscal Year 2025.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.

SB 579 Cotsonas WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Cherie Cotsonas

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

February 14, 2024

Good afternoon Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you in support of Senate Bill 579.

As the Vice President Maryland School Nutrition Association, I support SB 557. This bill would provide School breakfast and lunch at no cost to Maryland students.

In Maryland, students should be able to access school meals with dignity. Our students should not have to worry about their current home life, family finances, and how their peers will view them if they are in need. Every week students go to school across Maryland and have free access to textbooks, transportation to and from school, and technology. However, in Maryland students still need funds to be able to eat meals. I support this bill because I feel students should be able to walk through the breakfast and lunch line without a nervous thought about whether they are running up a “tab” and creating more debt for their parents.

In Maryland 1 in 8 children are food insecure. I feel more families go uncounted and have needs but are too proud to ask on behalf of their students. I support a bill that would open the doors to the cafeteria, welcome students, and allow children to eat with dignity. This bill would allow the cafeteria to be a refuge, free of anxiety and worry, for a student. Should this bill pass, struggling students would be able to leave their worries at the cafeteria doors and have an equal seat at the cafeteria table among their peers. By supporting this bill Maryland will also join all the other states that have led the charge and provided Universal Meals to their students.

Give our children a sense of pride, dignity, and a good foundation to learn by funding free nutritious meals for our students.

Thank you, Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee for allowing my brief statement of support for SB 579.

Cherie Cotsonas-Vice President of Maryland School Nutrition Association

SB 579 Cotsonas WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Cherie Cotsonas

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

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Cherie Cotsonas-Vice President of Maryland School Nutrition Association

SB 579 Cotsonas WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Cherie Cotsonas

Position: FAV

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In Maryland 1 in 8 children are food insecure. I feel more families go uncounted and have needs but are too proud to ask on behalf of their students. I support a bill that would open the doors to the cafeteria, welcome students, and allow children to eat with dignity. This bill would allow the cafeteria to be a refuge, free of anxiety and worry, for a student. Should this bill pass, struggling students would be able to leave their worries at the cafeteria doors and have an equal seat at the cafeteria table among their peers. By supporting this bill Maryland will also join all the other states that have led the charge and provided Universal Meals to their students.

Give our children a sense of pride, dignity, and a good foundation to learn by funding free nutritious meals for our students.

Thank you, Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee for allowing my brief statement of support for SB 579.

Cherie Cotsonas-Vice President of Maryland School Nutrition Association

SB 579 Cotsonas WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Cherie Cotsonas

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

February 14, 2024

Good afternoon Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you in support of Senate Bill 579.

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Cherie Cotsonas-Vice President of Maryland School Nutrition Association

TESTIMONY ON SB 579.pdf

Uploaded by: Christopher Cano

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY ON SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

February 14, 2024

Submitted by Christopher Cano, Director of Political & Legislative Affairs
On behalf of SEIU Local 500

Dear Chair Guzzone and Members of the Budget & Taxation Committee:

SEIU Local 500 supports SB 579, expanding the free breakfast & lunch program for all children, regardless of income, is a great first step in creating equal opportunity. No child should go hungry because their family falls outside the boundaries on a spreadsheet or they have to incur a debt that affects their advancement.

Feeding children in our public schools is a pillar to combatting the challenges of poverty. This should not be a controversial topic or difficult policy to decide.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future endeavors to make Maryland a global powerhouse when it comes to educating a 21st century workforce. This legislation supports that goal by ensuring children need not worry about when and where their next meal is coming from or how they will afford it.

We appreciate your consideration and support for SB 579.

SB 579 Wilt ORAL AND WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Cody Wilt

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

February 14, 2024

Good afternoon Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee.

My name is Cody Wilt. I am the President of the Maryland School Nutrition Association. I am here today to express the strong support for SB 579 by our entire statewide organization in all Maryland school districts. We are the program operators, managers, cooks and servers in each school and district.

The purpose of this bill is to serve all students a nutritious breakfast and lunch each day at no cost to them as part of their school day experience.

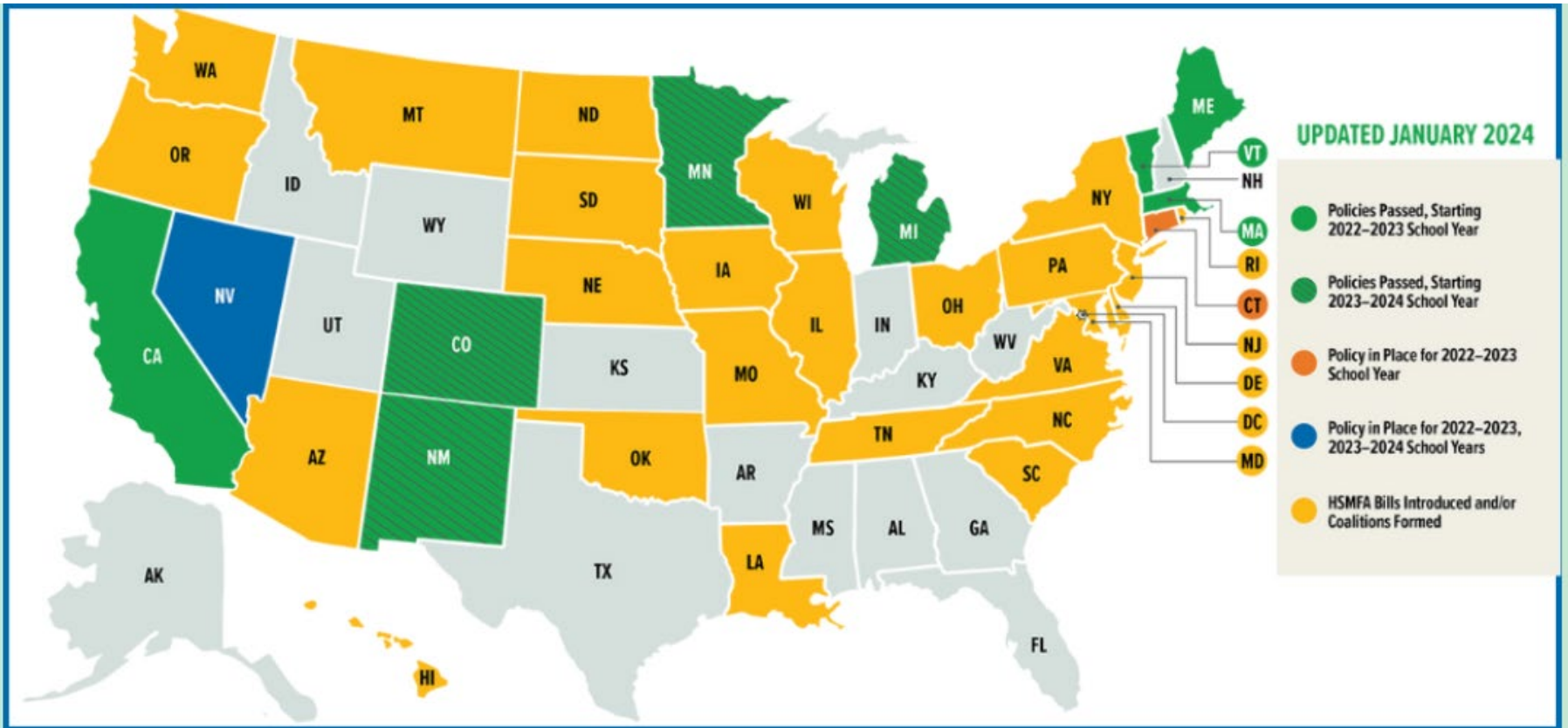
We see the need for this Bill each day in schools and recognize what school meals do for students. On the Universal Meals Program both during Covid when it was federally funded and now in the 7 states operating the Universal School Meals Program.

Current Research Reviews have found that Universal Free School Meals are associated with:

- Better attendance
- Less tardiness
- More ability to focus on and participate in classes
- Improved test scores
- Improved diet quality

The Maryland Legislature has shown strong support for the Blueprint for Education. This Universal Free Breakfast and Lunch Program is the best support for students in their educational experience by helping them get ready to learn because "A hungry child cannot learn!"

Thank you, Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee, for allowing me to testify.





2023 STATE LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY: YEAR END REVIEW

This report is a summary of key school nutrition state legislation introduced between January 1 and December 31, 2023.

TREND WATCH

Across the nation, there's a notable push towards ensuring every child receives a healthy school meal while at school. 34 out of the 50 states have either implemented or introduced legislation. SNA's [2024 Position Paper](#) urges Congress to offer healthy school meals for all students at no charge to support academic achievement, combat food insecurity and ease burdens on school nutrition staff so they can focus on serving students.

Healthy School Meals for All

a) Permanent: Eight states have permanently legislated healthy school meals for all students. They are:

California	Michigan
Colorado	Minnesota
Maine	New Mexico
Massachusetts	Vermont

b) Temporary: Nevada is offering healthy school meals to all students for the 2023-24 school year. Illinois passed healthy school meals for all for State Fiscal Year 2024, but it remains unfunded.

c) Pending: 27 states and the District of Columbia have introduced legislation to provide school meals for all. These states include:

Arizona	North Carolina
Connecticut	North Dakota
Delaware	Ohio
Hawaii	Oklahoma
Illinois	Oregon
Iowa	Pennsylvania
Louisiana	Rhode Island
Maryland	South Carolina
Missouri	South Dakota
Montana	Tennessee
Nebraska	Virginia
New Jersey	Wisconsin
New York	Washington
Nevada	Washington D.C.

Other Legislative Efforts

In addition to healthy school meals for all, several states are focusing on other areas of the program, such as increasing state reimbursement rates, addressing increasing requests for alternative meals due to dietary or religious needs, policies for unpaid meal debt balances and adjustments to school wellness plans.

SNA state advocacy resources are a collaborative effort intended to support grassroots efforts at the local level. We welcome your updates at advocacy@schoolnutrition.org.



School Breakfast Program Meal Pattern

	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Food Components	Amount of Food ^a per Week		
	(minimum per day)		
Fruits (cups) ^{b c}	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups) ^{b c}	0	0	0
Dark green	0	0	0
Red/Orange	0	0	0
Beans and peas (legumes)	0	0	0
Starchy	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Grains (oz eq) ^d	7-10 (1)	8-10 (1)	9-10 (1)
Meats/Meat Alternates (oz eq) ^e	0	0	0
Fluid milk ^f (cups)	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Other Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a 5-Day Week			
Min-max calories (kcal) ^{g h}	350-500	400-550	450-600
Saturated fat (% of total calories) ^h	<10	<10	<10
Sodium Target 1 (mg)	≤ 540	≤ 600	≤ 640
<i>Trans</i> fat ^h	Nutrition label or manufacturer specifications must indicate zero grams of <i>trans</i> fat per serving.		

^a Food items included in each group and subgroup and amount equivalents. Minimum creditable serving is 1/8 cup.

^b One-quarter cup of dried fruit counts as 1/2 cup of fruit; 1 cup of leafy greens counts as 1/2 cup of vegetables. No more than half of the fruit or vegetable offerings may be in the form of juice. All juice must be 100% full-strength.

^c Schools must offer 1 cup of fruit daily and 5 cups of fruit weekly. Vegetables may be substituted for fruits, but the first two cups per week of any such substitution must be from the dark green, red/orange, beans/peas (legumes), or "Other vegetables" subgroups, as defined in §210.10(c)(2)(iii) of this chapter.

^d At least 80 percent of grains offered weekly must meet the whole grain-rich criteria specified in FNS guidance, and the remaining grain items offered must be enriched. Schools may substitute 1 oz. eq. of meat/meat alternate for 1 oz. eq. of grains after the minimum daily grains requirement is met.

^e There is no meat/meat alternate requirement.

^f All fluid milk must be fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1 percent fat or less). Milk may be unflavored or flavored, provided that unflavored milk is offered at each meal service.

^g The average daily calories for a 5-day school week must be within the range (at least the minimum and no more than the maximum values).

^h Discretionary sources of calories (solid fats and added sugars) may be added to the meal pattern if within the specifications for calories, saturated fat, *trans* fat, and sodium. Foods of minimal nutritional value and fluid milk with fat content greater than 1 percent milk fat are not allowed.

**National School Lunch Program Meal Pattern**

	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Food Components	Amount of Food^a per Week		
	(minimum per day)		
Fruits (cups) ^b	2½ (½)	2½ (½)	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups) ^b	3¾ (¾)	3¾ (¾)	5 (1)
Dark green ^c	½	½	½
Red/Orange ^c	¾	¾	1¼
Beans and peas (legumes) ^c	½	½	½
Starchy ^c	½	½	½
Other ^{c,d}	½	½	¾
Additional Vegetables to Reach Total ^e	1	1	1½
Grains (oz eq) ^f	8-9 (1)	8-10 (1)	10-12 (2)
Meats/Meat Alternates (oz eq)	8-10 (1)	9-10 (1)	10-12 (2)
Fluid milk (cups) ^g	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Other Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a 5-Day Week			
Min-max calories (kcal) ^h	550-650	600-700	750-850
Saturated fat (% of total calories) ^h	<10	<10	<10
Sodium Interim Target 1 (mg) ^h	≤ 1,230	≤ 1,360	≤ 1,420
Sodium Interim Target 1A (mg) ^h _i	≤ 1,110	≤ 1,225	≤ 1,280
<i>Trans</i> fat ^h	Nutrition label or manufacturer specifications must indicate zero grams of <i>trans</i> fat per serving.		

^a Food items included in each group and subgroup and amount equivalents. Minimum creditable serving is ⅛ cup.

^b One-quarter cup of dried fruit counts as ½ cup of fruit; 1 cup of leafy greens counts as ½ cup of vegetables. No more than half of the fruit or vegetable offerings may be in the form of juice. All juice must be 100% full-strength.

^c Larger amounts of these vegetables may be served.

^d This category consists of “Other vegetables” as defined in paragraph (c)(2)(iii)(E) of this section. For the purposes of the NSLP, the “Other vegetables” requirement may be met with any

additional amounts from the dark green, red/orange, and beans/peas (legumes) vegetable subgroups as defined in paragraph (c)(2)(iii) of this section.

^e Any vegetable subgroup may be offered to meet the total weekly vegetable requirement.

^f At least 80 percent of grains offered weekly must meet the whole grain-rich criteria specified in FNS guidance, and the remaining grain items offered must be enriched.

^g All fluid milk must be fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1 percent fat or less). Milk may be flavored or flavored, provided that unflavored milk is offered at each meal service.

^h Discretionary sources of calories (solid fats and added sugars) may be added to the meal pattern if within the specifications for calories, saturated fat, *trans* fat, and sodium. Foods of minimal nutritional value and fluid milk with fat content greater than 1 percent are not allowed.

ⁱ Sodium Interim Target 1A must be met no later than July 1, 2023 (SY 2023-2024).



BaltimoreCounty_FAV_SB0579.pdf

Uploaded by: Elisabeth Sachs

Position: FAV



JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.
County Executive

JENNIFER AIOSA
Director of Government Affairs

AMANDA KONTZ CARR
Legislative Officer

WILLIAM J. THORNE
Legislative Associate

BILL NO.: **SB 579**

TITLE: **Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion**

SPONSOR: **Senator Guzzone**

COMMITTEE: **Budget and Taxation**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: **February 14, 2024**

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 579 – Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion. This vital legislation would expand the State Free Feeding Program to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students attending a qualifying school.

No student should be left to attend school on an empty stomach. Students who do not receive proper nutrition generally score lower on exams, struggle more to pay attention in class, and overall experience lower quality of life. Students who cannot afford to purchase breakfast or lunch are left at a significant disadvantage which threatens their ability to perform and break out of the cycle of poverty. Baltimore County is committed to ensuring that each and every student has their fundamental needs met.

Senate Bill 579 would significantly expand the availability of free meals to students by requiring that school which participate in either the federal School Breakfast Program or the National School Lunch program offer free breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost. If passed, this legislation would change the lives of students across the State who struggle with food insecurity. This is a significant step towards eliminating the barriers that keep Maryland’s students from reaching their full potential.

Accordingly, Baltimore County urges a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 579. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov.

MD4CS_MOST_MEC_HB696_SB579_Senate.pdf

Uploaded by: Ellie Mitchell

Position: FAV



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.

Rick Tyler, Co-Chair, MEC
md.ed.coalition@gmail.com

Ellie Mitchell, Co-Chair, MEC & Executive Director, MOST Network/MD4CS,
emitchell@mostnetwork.org

Maryland Out of School Time Network / Maryland Coalition for Community Schools

1500 Union Ave / Suite 2300
Baltimore MD 21211 / 410 374-7692
www.mostnetwork.org

SB 579 Goslee ORAL AND WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Eric Goslee

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

February 14, 2024

Good afternoon Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee.

The purpose of Senate Bill 579 is to provide students at any Maryland school that participates in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program breakfast and lunch at no cost to students or their families.

This Bill will help in the fight against Hunger. Irradicating hunger will aid in improved school performance leading to better concentration, increased academic performance, decreased behavior issues, and healthier students.

In Wicomico County, over 50% of our students qualify for free or reduced priced meals. This gives us the opportunity to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) where we currently offer our meals at no cost to all our students. CEP Eliminates the stigma towards free or reduced priced meals.

For some families that don't qualify for free meals, they are forced to choose, providing meals for their students by packing meals from home or purchasing versus putting gas in their car or paying a household bill.

School meal debt is no longer a concern for students and families. Parents no longer get emails or phone calls about their student's debt.

Universal meals are about providing nourishment with dignity. It's about investing in the foundation of learning and ensuring students are ready to learn so that we get the absolute most out of our most valuable resource, our students. It's about providing every student with equal access to the same things; transportation, books, education, and food while they're at school. It's about recognizing school nutrition as an integral part of our educational system. Now is the time to make Universal School Meals permanent for Maryland's future.

As the President Elect of the Maryland School Nutrition Association and the Food Service Director of Wicomico County Public Schools, I stand in support of Universal School Meals.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you in support of Senate Bill 579.

Every Student!
Every Meal!
Every School!

SB 579 Goslee ORAL AND WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Eric Goslee

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

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Position: FAV

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Every School!

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Uploaded by: Eric Goslee

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

February 14, 2024

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Every Student!
Every Meal!
Every School!

MD Catholic Conference_SB 579_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Garrett O'Day

Position: FAV



**MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE**

February 14, 2024

SB 579

**Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal
Expansion**

**Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee
Position: FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 579. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government. We also offer this testimony on behalf of the families of approximately 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland, as well as the one in every eight Maryland students educated in a nonpublic school, particularly the many whose schools participate in the Federal School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program.

Senate Bill 579 would allow schools participating in the Federal School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program to feed all students a free breakfast or lunch, respectively. The bill would allow the State to subsidize the cost of the free meals not provided through federal funding for both programs. Participating schools would not be authorized to charge any student for meals under either program.

Although Maryland is the wealthiest state in the country, one in eight households in Maryland face constant food insecurity. Sadly, children and adolescents are not exempt from that statistic. School breakfast and lunch programs are essential to not only ending hunger, but for improving the health and educational outcomes of students who live with food insecurity.

Our nonpublic schools that serve low-income students often operate on very tight budgets. Thus, some that would like to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision Program cannot, due to an inability to afford the cost gap in their school budgets that it would entail. This legislation might allow more schools to participate in that program and, thus, more kids to be fed, alleviating the burden on parents. Well over 100,000 meals are currently served annually to low-income students in nonpublic schools through these federal programs. This bill purports to ensure that all students in the State of Maryland whose schools participate in the free feeding programs are provided completely free breakfast and lunch, regardless of federal funding limitations. It is for these reasons that the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report for Senate Bill 579.

FINAL SB579 Support AACPS.pdf

Uploaded by: Grace Wilson

Position: FAV



**SB579 – PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION – BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PROGRAM –
UNIVERSAL EXPANSION**

February 14, 2024

BUDGET AND TAXATION

SUPPORT

Grace Wilson, Legislative & Policy Specialist (410.440.1758)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports **SB579**. This bill requires beginning in fiscal year 2026 if a school participates in the federal school breakfast program by providing a free or reduced-price breakfast to a student, each student in the school shall be offered a free breakfast that meets the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrition standards under the federal school breakfast program. Additionally, beginning in fiscal year 2026, if a school participates in the national school lunch program by providing a free or reduced-price lunch to a student, each student in the school shall be offered a free lunch that meets the USDA nutrition standards under the national school lunch program. The State is responsible for reimbursing a county board or a participating nonpublic school for the costs of offering each student a free breakfast or a free lunch.

Furthermore, the bill prohibits a county board or nonpublic school from charging a student any portion of the cost of a breakfast that meets the nutritional standards of the federal school breakfast program or a lunch that meets the nutritional standards of the national school lunch program beginning in fiscal year 2026. Finally, clarifying that the intent of the General Assembly that each county board and participating nonpublic schools maximize the use of all available federal funds in carrying out the requirements of the program.

AACPS recognizes the importance of developing a healthy school environment which promotes student health, well-being, and the ability to learn. Healthy school environments meet nutrition standards and guidelines for food and beverages available on school campus in accordance with State and federal laws and regulations which promote food comprised of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and protein. Free and nutritious meals for all students allow them to stay fueled, ready to learn, and out of the school nurse's office.

During the 2021-2022 school year, AACPS offered free school meals to all students and served 41,000 school lunches a day. During the 2022-2023 school year, free school meals were no longer available to all students, and AACPS is served 32,000 school lunches a day. Students who ate with us during the 2021-2022 school year did not choose to do so during the 2022-2023 school year. This bill would allow approximately 9,000 students to eat school meals again, free of charge, thus enabling them to better learn and succeed.

AACPS supports this bill that would provide free school meals to all students and ensures that all AACPS students are fueled and best prepared to engage in educational experiences. Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on SB579.

SB0579- FAV - FEC.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Heaven Jordan

Position: FAV



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY
FoodEquityCouncil

*Cultivating justice and economic
opportunity from farm to fork.*

**Testimony in Support of SB0579
Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal
Expansion
Budget and Taxation Committee
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 14, 2024**

Prince George's County Food Equity Council
1401 Mercantile Lane Suite #481
Largo, MD 20774

Dear Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Prince George's County Food Equity Council to express our wholehearted support for Senate Bill 0579 - Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion. As a staff member of our local food policy council, I have witnessed firsthand the impact of inadequate nutrition on the lives of children in Prince George's County. We believe all children should have free school meals, allowing them to concentrate on their education without hunger.

School meals are not merely a provision of sustenance; they are a fundamental component of academic success, childhood hunger reduction, and the promotion of overall well-being. Our mission aligns closely with the belief that nutritious meals contribute significantly to positive education and health outcomes for children. Like textbooks, computers, and transportation, we firmly believe that school meals should be accessible to all students, every school day.

However, the current structure of school nutrition programs often excludes many children in need, as their families may need to meet the eligibility threshold for no-cost meals. This threshold creates a gap where families, despite facing financial challenges, still need to qualify for the assistance their children require. Furthermore, the stigma associated with paying for meals leads eligible students, particularly in middle and high school, to opt-out, exacerbating the issue of childhood hunger.

The pandemic has shown us a viable alternative. Schools successfully offered free meals to all students, regardless of their learning mode, during the 2020-2021 school year. This trial run



demonstrated the undeniable benefits of providing meals at no cost to all students, benefiting children, families, and schools alike.

Universal access to school meals, irrespective of household income, can eliminate stigma, alleviate financial strain on families, and simplify administrative processes for school staff. By ensuring that all students receive nutritious breakfasts and lunches, we can create a positive and inclusive cafeteria environment, eliminating the burdensome issue of unpaid school meal fees and fostering an atmosphere where every student can thrive.

Moreover, the importance of this initiative extends beyond the classroom. It is a crucial step towards advancing racial equity and justice, ensuring that students from Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities have equal access to the essential nutrition they need for academic success and personal development.

Hungry kids cannot learn effectively. Now, more than ever, we urge Maryland to make this vital investment to guarantee all students access to the healthy meals they need to thrive. We firmly support SB0579 as a progressive and necessary step towards a brighter, more equitable future for the children of Prince George's County and the entire state of Maryland.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Heaven Jordan

Heaven Jordan

Prince George's County Food Equity Council

SB 579 - SUPP - B&T - SchoolBreakfast and Lunch -

Uploaded by: Henry Bogdan

Position: FAV



marylandnonprofits.org

1500 Union Avenue | Suite 2500 | Baltimore, MD 21211
410.727.6367 | 800.273.6367 | Fax 410.235.2190

February 14, 2024

Testimony on Senate Bill 579
Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast
and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Position: Favorable

Maryland Nonprofits is a statewide association of more than 1800 nonprofit organizations and institutions. We urge you to support Senate Bill 579 to expand 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.

Extensive research has linked participation in school meals to a number of benefits, including improved academic achievement, better test scores, and improved cognitive function standardized test scores, and cognitive function; improved attendance; improved nutrition and reduced food insecurity.

As vital as these school nutrition programs are, too many children miss out on school meals because of the current structure. Many struggling families do not meet the eligibility criteria for no-cost meals, which for the 2023-2024 school year requires a family of four to earn less than \$55,500 annually. With the cost of living on the rise, there are too many Maryland families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs and yet do not qualify because their income exceeds this incredibly low eligibility threshold.

Providing school meals at no cost to all students, would support equity in the classroom by making sure every child has the nutrition they need in order to excel. These meals are just as important to students' academic success as textbooks or transportation and should be treated as a critical component to education. When students are distracted by hunger because they were unable to participate in school breakfast or lunch, they miss out on the chance to learn and benefit from the important opportunities offered by Maryland's education system. Additionally, it would ease the pressure on household food budgets and reduce administrative work for school staff by eliminating school meal debt and ending the financial burden that debt creates for families and school districts.

Please make Healthy School Meals for All a priority and join the growing list of states that have guaranteed all students have access to the healthy meals they need to grow and thrive.

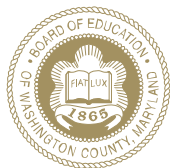
We ask that you give Senate Bill 579 a FAVORABLE report.



SB 579 favorable WCBOE 2-14-24.pdf

Uploaded by: Jamie Brown

Position: FAV



BILL: House Bill 696 / Senate Bill 579
TITLE: Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion
HEARING DATE: February 14, 2024 / February 14, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means / Senate Budget and Taxation
CONTACT: Mr. Steve Edwards, Deputy Communications Officer (301-766-8914)

The Washington County Board of Education supports House Bill 696/Senate Bill 579, which would alter the standards of the State Free Feeding Program, beginning in fiscal year 2025, to require that if a school participates in the federal School Breakfast Program or the National School Lunch Program, then each student in the school must be offered a meal at no cost to the student; providing for the reimbursement rate at which the State shall pay county boards and participating nonpublic schools for meals offered to students, etc.

Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) recognizes the connection between student health and wellness, a healthy school environment, and the ability for students to learn and reach their full potential. Providing nutritious meals at no cost to all students at school not only promotes good nutrition, health, and well-being, but is also important in helping to decrease absenteeism, reduce the number of behavioral issues, contribute to an improved school environment, and helps to equip students to better learn and succeed.

This bill will benefit all families by removing the financial burden of purchasing school meals, especially for those families whose income slightly exceeds the eligibility requirements for federal free and reduced-price meal programs or who otherwise qualify, but fail to complete the necessary application. Currently, school breakfast in Washington County costs \$1.65 and lunch at the elementary level is \$2.45, while secondary students pay \$2.70. Therefore, a family who is ineligible for free or reduced-price meals would pay either \$4.10 or \$4.35 per day for their child to eat school-provided breakfast and lunch. If that student attends all 180 days of school, the annual cost is \$738 or \$783, depending on the grade level. While this may not seem like much to some, it is a burden for many of our families who are forced to make a choice between having their students either go hungry at school or the family go into arrears with the school system, as we never deny a child food.

For the current school year, families are already indebted to WCPS approximately \$47,000 for school meals. This total is likely to continue to grow, but it is expected that just a small portion of that indebtedness will be collected. This bill will benefit schools by eliminating the need to act as a collection agency and devote precious resources to collect outstanding balances from families. It will also prevent school districts from being in the unenviable position of deciding whether to secure the services of a collection agency which would be harmful for both the family and the school district's relationship with them.

This bill will also help to eliminate the concerns of some families about their student being singled-out or treated differently when securing free meals at school alongside other students who do not participate in the federal free and reduced price meal programs. Schools should be places where all students feel welcomed and valued. Providing them with free breakfast and lunch only helps to deliver that important message while helping to ensure each and every student is at their personal best and ready to learn.

Building a Community That Inspires Curiosity, Creativity, and Achievement.

The Washington County Board of Education respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 696 and Senate Bill 579.

Thank you.

Cc: Washington County Board of Education Members
Washington County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly
Dr. David T. Sovine, Superintendent
Dr. Jennifer Webster, Associate Superintendent for Administration and Leadership
Dr. Garry Willow, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Jeffrey Proulx, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Ilissa Ramm, Chief Legal Counsel
Mr. Michael Embley, Director of Food and Nutrition Services
Mr. John Woolums, Director of Governmental Relations, Maryland Association of Boards of Education
Ms. Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland

WDC 2024 Testimony_SB579_FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: JoAnne Koravos

Position: FAV



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

**Senate Bill 579 - Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs –
Universal Expansion
Budget and Taxation Committee/ Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 14, 2024
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2024 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic Clubs in our County with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC strongly supports SB 579, which aims to expand 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.

School meals play an important role in supporting academic success, reducing childhood hunger, supporting good nutrition, and ensuring that students are well-nourished and ready to get the most out of the school day. Extensive research has linked participation in school meals to several benefits:

- improved academic achievement, standardized test scores, and cognitive function^{1 2 3};
- improved attendance, which is positively linked to academic achievement^{4 5};
- reduced food insecurity, which is linked to poor academic outcomes⁶;
- improved nutrition, such as increased consumption of fruit, vegetables, and milk⁷;
- improved overall health and long-term health outcomes, as well as reduction in obesity rates, anxiety, and depression^{8 9}.

¹ Vaisman, N., Voet, H., Akivis, A., & Vakil, E., (1996). Effects of Breakfast Timing on Cognitive Functions of Elementary School Students. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8859144/>.

² Ptomey, L. T., Steger, F. L., Schubert, M. M., Lee, J., Willis, E. A., Sullivan, D. K., Szabo-Reed, A. N., Washburn, R. A., & Donnelly, J. E. (2016). Breakfast intake and composition is associated with superior academic achievement in elementary schoolchildren. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26697955/>.

³ Frisvold, D. E. (2015). Nutrition and cognitive achievement: an evaluation of the School Breakfast Program. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272714002497>.

⁴ Murphy, J. M. (2007). Breakfast and learning: an updated review. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228638584_Breakfast_and_Learning_An_Updated_Review.

⁵ Basch, C. E. (2011). Breakfast and the achievement gap among urban minority youth. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21923876/>.

⁶ Huang, J., & Barnidge, E. (2016). Low-income children's participation in the National School Lunch Program and household food insufficiency. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26722983/>.

⁷ Clark, M. A., & Fox, M. K. (2009). Nutritional quality of the diets of U.S. public school children and the role of the school meal programs. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19166672/>.

⁸ Gundersen, C., Kreider, B., & Pepper, J. (2012). The impact of the National School Lunch Program on child health: a nonparametric bounds analysis. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0304407611001205>.

⁹ Kleinman, R. E., Hall, S., Green, H., Korzec-Ramirez, D., Patton, K., Pagano, M. E., & Murphy, J. M. (2002). Diet, breakfast, and academic performance in children. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12428078/>.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

As vital as these school nutrition programs are, too many children miss out on school meals because of the current structure. Many struggling families do not meet the eligibility criteria for no-cost meals, which for the 2023-2024 school year requires a family of four to earn less than \$55,500 annually.¹⁰ With the cost of living on the rise, there are too many Maryland families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs and yet do not qualify because their income exceeds this incredibly low eligibility threshold.

Now is the time for Maryland to make this critical investment in our children and communities. Schools were able to offer school meals at no cost beginning in the spring of 2020 through the 2021-2022 school year during the height of the pandemic with federal relief funding. This trial run showed how beneficial offering meals at no cost to all students is for children, families, and schools, but now that federal funding has run dry, and Maryland needs to fill the gap.

Providing school meals at no cost to all students, would support equity in the classroom by making sure every child has the nutrition they need to excel. These meals are just as important to students' academic success as textbooks or transportation and should be treated as a critical component to education. When students are distracted by hunger because they were unable to participate in school breakfast or lunch, they miss out on the chance to learn and benefit from the important opportunities offered by Maryland's education system. Additionally, it would ease the pressure on household food budgets and reduce administrative work for school staff by eliminating school meal debt and ending the financial burden that debt creates for families and school districts.

Hungry kids can't wait. It's time for Maryland to make Healthy School Meals for All a priority and join the growing list of states¹¹ that have guaranteed all students have access to the healthy meals they need to grow and thrive.

We ask for your support for SB 579 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Tazeen Ahmad
WDC President

Laura Stewart
WDC Children & Youth
Subcommittee

Melissa Bender
Co-Chair, WDC
Advocacy

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. (2022). Child Nutrition Programs: Income Eligibility Guidelines. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-021622>.

¹¹ Food Research and Action Center. (2023). "States Show Us What Is Possible With Healthy School Meals for All Policies." <https://frac.org/blog/free-healthy-school-meals-for-all-policies#:~:text=California%2C%20Maine%2C%20Colorado%2C%20Minnesota,School%20Meals%20for%20All%20policies>.

SB 579.State Funding for Univeral School Breakfast

Uploaded by: John Woolums

Position: FAV

BILL: Senate Bill 579
TITLE: Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion
POSITION: SUPPORT
DATE: February 14, 2024
COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation
Education, Energy, and the Environment
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's boards of education, supports Senate Bill 579, which will ensure state reimbursement of local school system costs to provide universal access to school breakfasts and lunches for all students.

MABE recognizes the importance of developing healthy school environments, which includes providing high quality health and physical education programs as well as meeting the nutritional needs of students through school breakfasts, lunches, and afterschool meals. Thousands of children from low-income households in Maryland depend on school meals for the nutrition they need to learn and grow. Unfortunately, for too long too many children and families have not taken advantage of school meal programs for reasons ranging from the cumbersome paperwork requirements to the stigma associated with participating. Enacting and funding universal access to nutritious school breakfasts and lunches would contribute greatly to the overall health and well-being of our students by eliminating such barriers.

Early in the pandemic, Congress gave the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) the authority to issue child nutrition waivers so that schools systems could adapt their meal programs to provide meals to students even as buildings were closed. These child nutrition waivers were to expire on June 30, 2022 which would have resulted in discontinuing breakfast, lunch and afterschool meal options for millions of students. MABE joined other state and national organizations in urging Congress to extend the child nutrition waivers so that school systems could continue to receive the federal reimbursements for the meals they serve. The Keep Kids Fed Act was enacted to extend partial school meal flexibilities in the 2022-2023 school year. However, today, in the absence of federal action, Maryland must lead by investing additional state funding to ensure the continued availability of universal access to school breakfasts and lunches for all students across the state.

Federal and state standards for school nutrition continue to be reformed and enhanced to address the national epidemics of juvenile diabetes and obesity. At the same time, child hunger and inequitable access to healthy meals impacts far too many students as an obstacle to learning. Therefore, MABE also supports federal legislation and actions by the federal government to improve and increase funding for expanded access to high quality school meal programs.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 579.

FRAC Testimony - Support - SB579.pdf

Uploaded by: Julia Gross

Position: FAV

February 14, 2024

Committee: Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Bill: SB 579 - Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion
Position: Support

Testimony of Alexis Bylander, Senior Policy Analyst at the Food Research & Action Center

Thank you for the opportunity for the [Food Research & Action Center](#) to submit testimony in support of HB 696, which would provide all Maryland students with access to a free breakfast and lunch at school.

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national nonprofit organization working to improve public policies and public-private partnerships to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States. FRAC has worked for decades to improve and strengthen the federal School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs through federal and state legislation. We work extensively with federal, state, and local government agencies, schools, private nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that the programs reach the children who need them.

States across the country are recognizing the importance of free school meals for all students and passing legislation. California, New Mexico, Minnesota, Michigan, Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont, and Colorado have passed permanent School Meals for All policies and many additional states are currently considering similar legislation. Nevada has used COVID relief funds to offer free school meals to all students during the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years.

The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program are the two largest child nutrition programs in the United States. Students are in school approximately 180 days a year and many students participate in school-based before and after school care and summer programming. Providing healthy meals to students through the School Nutrition Programs can significantly increase food security for students. In fact, a [recent study](#) found that U.S. children are getting their healthiest meals at school, demonstrating that school meals are one of the federal government's most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children.

The School Nutrition Programs support academic achievement. School meals serve as both a nutritional support and an educational support because hungry children do not

have the focus and energy to learn or get the most out of their school day. There is a strong body of research that links participation in school meals to positive educational and health outcomes for our nation's children. Studies have shown participation in school meals improves students' attendance, behavior, and academic achievement, and reduces tardiness. Students who eat breakfast at school [perform better on standardized tests](#) than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home, and have improved scores in spelling, reading, and math. Additionally, school breakfast reduces the number of visits to the school nurse in the morning, [improves students' mental health](#), and reduces behavioral problems, anxiety, and depression. The positive impacts of participating in school meals are long lasting, supporting long-term overall educational attainment among students participating in school meals.

All students should permanently receive free school meals. Serving school meals to all students at no cost would be a gamechanger for students, families and schools, supporting students' education and health and improving school nutrition finances and operations.

Serving all students eliminates the stigma associated with school meals and will put an end to unpaid school meal debt. Offering free and reduced-price meals only to students from low-income households can create a stigma and reduce participation. By providing every student the opportunity to participate in school meals, the stigma some children, particularly older students, fear of being labeled low-income by their classmates is eliminated. Free meals for all students eliminate school meal debt, which has been a problem for many families and schools under a tiered payment system.

Perhaps most importantly, at a time when our country is critically examining how to end racial disparities, **free school meals for all can help advance equity.** Free meals would help reduce racial disparities in health and education for Black, Latinx and Indigenous children, who experience hunger at disproportionate rates and face systemic barriers to food access both at school and in their communities. Providing school meals to all students is also critical for advancing racial equity and justice, as it would ensure that Black, Indigenous and Latinx students are able to access the key nutrition they need to thrive in the classroom and beyond.

Providing free school meals to all students is an investment in Maryland's future. We urge you to support SB 579.

Maryland Hunger Solutions - Support for SB 579 - U

Uploaded by: Julia Gross

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

*Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee*

February 14, 2024

Maryland Hunger Solutions strongly supports SB 579, which aims to provide state funding for schools operating the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program to provide a healthy school breakfast and school lunch to all children at no cost to them or their families.

As a statewide, non-partisan, nonprofit working to end hunger in Maryland, Maryland Hunger Solutions strives to overcome existing barriers to state and federal nutrition assistance programs and create self-sustaining connections between Maryland residents and nutritious foods.

Among these nutrition programs, the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program play the most critical role as the nation's first line of defense against childhood food insecurity.

School meals have been shown to be some of the healthiest meals many children consume on a daily basis, providing students with nutrition they need to learn and thrive during the school day and beyond. [Multiple studies have linked participation in school meals to an incredible number of beneficial outcomes for students](#) including reduced food insecurity, decreased rates of obesity, and improved overall nutrition and wellness. Beyond reducing hunger, this research also links participation in school meals to positive educational outcomes such as enhanced child development and school readiness, and improved academic achievement, attendance, and classroom behavior.

During the height of the pandemic, federally funded free school meals served as a critical resource to keep children fed, alleviate child hunger, and advance racial equity and child well-being during a time of extreme uncertainty. The role that school meals played during the pandemic and subsequent school closures underscores the importance of this nutritional safety net to the health and well-being of Maryland communities.

The loss of federal pandemic-related funding for free school meals last school year has been devastating for Maryland students and families at a time when historically high inflation and grocery prices are driving the need for these programs higher than ever. Across the state, just over 407,000 Maryland students lost access to this benefit and are now required to pay for their school meals.

Maryland has made great strides in the past that have helped to mitigate the impact of this loss, such as covering the reduced-price copay for low-income families, and expanding the number of students directly certified for free meals through Medicaid data matching. Additionally, many eligible schools have been able to continue providing school meals to all students at no cost through the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP provides federal reimbursement for schools that have high poverty rates that are directly certified from other federal programs. Research provided by Dr. Susan Gross of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health on the implementation of the CEP in Maryland



clearly shows that this universal meals program not only helps students and schools, but helps to reduce food insecurity in the community.

Despite these efforts, many families and school systems are now facing immense challenges with the return to a tiered payment system.

Too many children who qualify for free school meals fall through the cracks due to stigma and administrative barriers. When students perceive school meals as only for children from low-income households, many decline to participate, despite their hunger. Additional burdens such as literacy and language barriers also keep many eligible families from submitting school meal applications.

The extremely low eligibility threshold excludes many more families. For example, a family of four living off of just \$55,000 a year is unable to qualify for any assistance. With Maryland's already high cost of living and current inflation rates, more families than ever are struggling to make ends meet but do not qualify for free meals.

School systems are reporting unprecedented increases in school meal debt. Students and families are not the only ones facing these challenges. When families struggle to pay for school meals, schools take on the burden of those unpaid school meal fee, forcing them to spend valuable time and resources trying to find additional funds to cover their operating costs, often at the expense of general funds that would otherwise be used for educational programming and other important wraparound services.

The solution remains clear. Providing healthy school meals to all students at no cost was a proven success during the pandemic and in the 351 Maryland schools using CEP to continue offering school meals for free to all students, including every school in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Caroline County, Somerset County, Dorchester County, and Wicomico County.

Offering school meals to all students at no cost results in more children eating breakfast and lunch at school, allowing families to stretch their food budgets at home, and removing the burden of school meal debt from families and school systems. By passing and enacting SB 579, Maryland will be making an important step in advancing equity, supporting students' education and health, and improving school nutrition operations.

Hungry children can't wait. Now is the time for our state to act on this opportunity to make the smart investment in our children and Maryland's future.

Our national partner organization, the Food Research and Action Center, has been working with schools and states across the nation as they work to implement healthy school meal programs. Currently 8 state, including California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Vermont have passed similar legislation.

While Maryland has previously missed out on this important opportunity, **Maryland Hunger Solutions respectfully urges a favorable report on SB 579** so that we don't fall behind the growing list of states making investments in children's health and nutrition.

Thank you for your consideration.

SB 579_MD Center on Economic Policy_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kali Schumitz

Position: FAV



Expanding Access to No-Cost School Meals Will Boost Health and Learning For Maryland Students

Position Statement Supporting Senate Bill 579

Given before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

In times of uncertainty and increase economic anxiety in Maryland households reducing the financial strain on low-income families would be a significant relief. Requiring the cost of providing school lunch to be covered by federal reimbursement and state funding would improve health and education for Maryland children. **For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports SB 579.**

School meal programs are a critical resource that provide children with the nutrition they need to thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in both the short and long term. However, the labeling of children and families who benefit from such programs creates social barriers. Maryland can address this by offering school breakfast and lunch to all students, ensuring every child is able to get a healthy meal at school while also eliminating the stigma of these critical programs.

Additionally, SB 579 will help to address the growing food insecurity impacting families. As of October, more than 445,000 Marylanders reported that they didn't always have enough food, highlighting the ongoing need for robust food assistance in the state.ⁱ Covering the cost of breakfast and lunch for all Maryland students will help to ensure that fewer of our students face fewer struggles in or out of the classroom.

Extensive research has linked participation in school meals to a number of benefits:

- Improved academic achievement, standardized test scores, and cognitive function;
- Improved attendance, which is positively linked to academic achievement;
- Reduced food insecurity, which is linked to poor academic outcomes;
- Improved nutrition, such as increased consumption of fruit, vegetables, and milk;
- Improved overall health and long-term health outcomes, as well as reduction in obesity rates, anxiety, and depression.

Providing school meals at no cost to all students and families in the state for an additional school year is a smart and effective investment in Maryland communities. **For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Budget and Taxation Committee to make a favorable report on SB 579.**

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 579

Bill summary

SB 579 alters the standards of the State Free Feeding Program, beginning in fiscal year 2025, to require free school meals for all students. The bill also provides state funding to cover the costs of providing free school meals.

Background

In 2021 and 2022, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided waivers to schools across the country, allowing them to serve free school meals to all students. As many Marylanders continue to struggle with high costs for food, rent and other essentials, this ability to serve all students nutritious meals, regardless of income, needs to be extended.

Too many children in need are left out due to the current school meals program structure. To qualify for free school meals, a student's family must be living at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, which translates to annual income of less than \$35,000 for a family of four for the 2021–2022 school year. Similarly, a family of four must have an annual income of around \$49,000 or less to qualify for reduced-price meals. Because the eligibility threshold for these programs are so low, many Maryland families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs do not qualify.

Equity Implications

Policies in the past have led to a system of unequal opportunities for marginalized groups within Maryland. Although the most obviously racially discriminatory policies have long been overturned or mitigated, the impact of these policies continue to persist in both society and public policy and have led to significant racial and health disparities. Families with children, Marylanders of color, and people with disabilities are all more likely to qualify for and need food assistance programs because of these barriers. Children of color experience much higher rates of economic insecurity and poverty and are more likely to benefit from expanded access to school meals.

Impact

Senate Bill 579 would likely **improve racial and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ Household Pulse Survey, Week 63, Food Sufficiency and Food Insecurity Table 1, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/hhp/hhp63.html>

YDM - SB 579 - FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Karson Kamenetz

Position: FAV



Young Democrats of Maryland

SB579 Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

**JOINT Budget and Taxation Committee + Education, Energy, & Environment Committee
Wednesday, February 14, 2024
SUPPORT**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in favor of SB 579. The **Young Democrats of Maryland** (YDM) represent the next generation of Marylanders and seek to advance policies which allow Maryland youth to thrive. This bill represents one of our top priorities; allocating state funds to ensure every Maryland student that attends a public school enrolled in the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Program is offered a meal at no-cost.

YDM is deeply committed to ensuring equitable access to the tools necessary for Maryland's students to achieve academic success. Because of the amount of time a student spends at school, their school environment plays a significant role in their diet and overall health.¹ School meals, just like a class textbook or bus-ride to class, are essential for a student to maximize their potential in the classroom. Numerous studies have detailed a direct correlation between school-provided meals and academic performance in a variety of metrics.^{2 3 4} It is clear from the evidence base that student hunger is an obstacle towards educational equity.

During the pandemic, expanded access to school meals served as a lifeline for families during that difficult time. With the expiration of federal resources, too many children now miss out on school meals because the eligibility criteria leaves out struggling families. By ensuring all students within qualifying schools are offered a meal, the bill reduces pressure on family budgets when the cost of living is rising. By providing equitable access to these meals, SB 579 ensures that no child misses out on these tangible benefits. The bill aligns with the Moore Miller Administration's vision to end child poverty, and we hope it will be a priority for the General Assembly as well.

For these reasons, we respectfully request your support for SB 579 and urge a favorable committee report.

Melissa Bender
YDM Vice President for Political Affairs
Chair, YDM Legislative and Policy Committee

Karson Kamenetz
YDM Legislative and Policy Committee

¹Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33799780/>.

²Effects of Breakfast Timing on Cognitive Functions of Elementary School Students. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8859144/>.

³Breakfast intake and composition is associated with superior academic achievement in elementary schoolchildren. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26697955/>.

⁴Nutrition and cognitive achievement: an evaluation of the School Breakfast Program. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272714002497>.

SB 579 - Universal Expansion - Breakfast and Lunch

Uploaded by: Ken Phelps Jr

Position: FAV



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE
OF MARYLAND

The Maryland Episcopal
Public Policy
Network

Testimony in Support of SB 579

**Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal
Expansion**

****FAVORABLE****

TO: Sen. Guy Guzzone, Chair; Sen. Jim Rosapepe, Vice Chair; and the members
of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Rev. Margaret E. VanAuker, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network, Diocese
of Maryland

DATE: February 14, 2024

One of the core beliefs of The Episcopal Church is that we should strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being. This includes respecting the dignity of every child by supporting quality breakfast and lunch during the school days.

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland supported, at its General Conventions, resolutions that support nutritional programs for children:

Episcopal Church Resolution GC 2015-A032 reaffirms the commitment to address poverty and hunger, focusing on child hood education and the commitment to federal nutrition programs and to other safety net programs that address basic food and health care need in vulnerable populations.

We believe that giving this bill SB 579 a FAVORABLE report would provide the nutrition that the children of Maryland need.

We urge a favorable report.

SB 579_Horizon Foundation_fav.pdf

Uploaded by: Kerry Darragh

Position: FAV



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

February 14, 2024

COMMITTEE: Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

BILL: SB 579 – Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

POSITION: Support

The Horizon Foundation is the largest independent health philanthropy in Maryland. We are committed to a Howard County free from systemic inequities, where all people can live abundant and healthy lives.

The Foundation is pleased to support SB 579 – Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion.

SB 579 would require Maryland schools that participate in the federal School Breakfast Program or the National School Lunch Program to offer each student those meals at no cost, beginning in FY 2025. Those meals would also be required to meet nutritional standards set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for those programs.

Children’s food insecurity has been a problem across the nation for many years but became a glaring crisis in the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when schools – which are many students’ primary or only source of healthy food during the day – closed. Rightly so, the federal government granted waivers to schools to offer universal free school lunch to students through the pandemic, and communities across the nation, including Howard County, came together to try and fill the gaps to ensure children did not go hungry. Those pandemic-era waivers have expired, requiring families to qualify for these programs once again based on income.

Like other communities across the state, Howard County families have felt the pain of rising food costs and an increasingly high cost of living. Though we are known as an affluent county, our lower- and middle-income students and their families are at risk of, or are already experiencing, food insecurity. Some of these families who are struggling may not apply for or even qualify for the current free and reduced meals programs. SB 579 would ensure that no student falls through the cracks or has to worry about whether they will have food to eat during the day.

A 2022 report from the Food Research & Action Center studied 62 large school districts across the country who used universal meal waivers during the pandemic. The findings were clear: 95 percent of districts said meal waivers decreased hunger among their students; 89 percent said the waivers

Lisa M. Pearson
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David Wolf

Lanlan Xu, Ph.D.

made it easier for parents and guardians; 85 percent said they erased the stigma associated with free school meals; and 82 percent reported that they supported academic achievement.¹ To help our students be healthy and successful, and to ease the burden on families who may be struggling to make ends meet, universal school meals should be made permanent.

Providing healthy school meals has long been a priority for the Horizon Foundation. Years ago, we launched a pilot program with the Howard County Public School System to increase fruit and vegetable offerings and offer more nutritious meals at three elementary schools. That program is now standard in every Howard County school. Students of every age in Howard County and across Maryland deserve healthy food to eat and no child should ever go hungry. For this reason, the Horizon Foundation **SUPPORTS SB 579** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ Food Research & Action Center. Large School District Report 2022: <https://frac.org/large-school-district-report-2022>

Support AHA SB 579 Healthy School Meals for All.pd

Uploaded by: Laura Hale

Position: FAV



February 12, 2024

Testimony of Laura Hale

American Heart Association

Favorable SB 579 Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Honorable Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. The American Heart Association extends its strong support for SB 579 Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association.

For children to succeed in school, it is essential that they have a healthy lunch and a healthy breakfast. A hungry child cannot learn. We as a state have set forth our priorities on where we will fund and the great wisdom has been made to push our children for academic achievement. We have set forth the task of funding a variety of things to make that better, but the space we currently lag behind is in the feeding of our children. Children cannot succeed without proper nutrition, and we know that for most children they receive up to half of their daily calories from school meals¹. Research has also found that school meals are the healthiest meals that children receive each day². During the pandemic we provided breakfast and lunch to all children, no questions asked, and it made a difference for families and kids. Now that the federal funding is gone, many children are falling through the cracks. Whether their parents make slightly too much money to qualify, whether forms are not filled out, or because of the stigma³ of being labeled “the poor kid” children are not eating. We have the opportunity to change all of that with this legislation. We know this legislation works, a meta-analysis published by the NIH noted that when schools offered healthy school meals for all they, “found positive associations with diet quality, food security, and academic performance⁴.” This meta-analysis also outlines positive association in BMI and possibly improves in household income particularly for low-income families⁵.

Families are struggling right now, think of the price of eggs⁶ and we as a state have the opportunity to make a difference. Research out of Johns Hopkins showed how much offering free school meals for all made a difference, not only for children, but also for their families. As families who participated in school meals were able to stave off food insecurity or not become more food insecure. It was a key protective factor in making sure Maryland families did not drop deeper into poverty or our middle-class families to

¹ [School Nutrition Environment | Healthy Schools | CDC](#)

² [Trends in Food Sources and Diet Quality Among US Children and Adults, 2003-2018 | Lifestyle Behaviors | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network](#)

³ [Participation in the National School Lunch Program: Importance of School-Level and Neighborhood Contextual Factors - Mirtcheva - 2009 - Journal of School Health - Wiley Online Library](#)

⁴ [Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

⁵ [Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

⁶ [Local Maryland businesses deal with surge of egg prices - CBS Baltimore \(cbsnews.com\)](#)

not fall into poverty⁷. We can choose to leave no one behind, by investing and providing healthy school meals for all.

This legislation is a great equalizer for Maryland children, to start them out on the right foot for good nutrition and to make sure they are fed for success in school. We would never think of charging a child to ride the bus or for textbooks, why would we charge them for lunch or breakfast? A necessity they need to succeed in school.

The American Heart Association urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 579.

⁷ [Pre-pandemic to early-pandemic changes in risk of household food insecurity among Maryland families with children - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

Uploaded by: Laura Stewart

Position: FAV

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland Senate
Budget and Taxation Committee - For the Hearing on
Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion (SB579)
February 14, 2024
SUPPORT**

Free State PTA represents over 70,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. Free State PTA is composed of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. As the state's premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. ***Senate Bill 579, Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion – aligns with Free State PTA's legislative agenda by ensuring children receive nutritional support they need with compassion and dignity, regardless of the ability to pay for school meals. National PTA also supports federal and state funding programs that implement Universal Free School Meals for all students, regardless of income levels.***¹

Free State PTA strongly supports SB 579, which aims to expand 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. This legislation is an essential investment for the health and academic success of Maryland students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought increased attention to the unacceptably high number of Maryland families that struggle with food insecurity, a number which has remained alarmingly elevated over the past three years. As hundreds of thousands of Maryland children and families continue down the long road to recovery from the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, there has never been a more important time to make significant investments in the school meal programs.

Extensive research has linked participation in school meals to a number of benefits:

- improved academic achievement, standardized test scores, and cognitive function²;
- improved attendance, which is positively linked to academic achievement³;
- reduced food insecurity, which is linked to poor academic outcomes⁴;
- improved nutrition, such as increased consumption of fruit, vegetables, and milk⁵;
- improved overall health and long-term health outcomes, as well as reduction in obesity rates, anxiety, and depression⁶.

¹<https://www.pta.org/home/advocacy/ptas-positions/Individual-Position-Statements/position-statement---improving-school-meals-program/>

² Vaisman, N., Voet, H., Akivis, A., & Vakil, E., (1996). Effects of Breakfast Timing on Cognitive Functions of Elementary School Students. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8859144/>

³ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228638584_Breakfast_and_Learning_An_Updated_Review.

⁴ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26722983/>

⁵ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19166672/>

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0304407611001205>

Marylanders need this investment. During the 2020 and 2021 school years, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided waivers to schools across the country, allowing school meals to be served at no cost to all students across the country, ensuring that every student has access to these important benefits. However, now that these waivers have ended, we have returned to a tiered payment system that leaves too many children out by allowing them to fall through the cracks. For example, to qualify for free school meals, a student's family must be living at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, which translates to annual income of less than \$36,000 for a family of four for the 2021–2022 school year. Similarly, a family of four must have an annual income of around \$52,000 or less to qualify for reduced-price meals. With the cost of living on the rise, there are too many Maryland families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs and yet do not qualify because their income exceeds this incredibly low eligibility threshold. There have been reports of children skipping meals because they have a lunch debt. Teachers often attempt to fill in the gap by providing snacks to hungry children.

By providing school meals at no cost to all students, Maryland would be supporting equity in the classroom and making sure every child has the nutrition they need in order to excel. These meals are important to students' academic success just as textbooks or transportation are and should be treated as a critical component to education. When students are distracted by hunger because they are unable to afford school breakfast or lunch, they miss out on the chance to learn and benefit from the important opportunities offered by Maryland's education system.

Hungry kids can't learn. Ensuring that every child in the state has access to a nutritious school breakfast and lunch every day is a smart and effective investment in Maryland's communities and future. **Therefore, the Free State PTA urges the passage of SB579.** The **Maryland Education Coalition** joins this testimony.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

Gerrod Tyler, President
GTyler@FSPTA.org

SB579_AACFB Testimony FAVORABLE.pdf

Uploaded by: Leah Paley

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

February 12, 2024

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee,

The Anne Arundel County Food Bank strongly supports SB 579, which aims to expand 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.

School meals play an important role in supporting academic success, reducing childhood hunger, supporting good nutrition, and ensuring that students are well-nourished and ready to get the most out of the school day. Extensive research has linked participation in school meals to several benefits:

- improved academic achievement, standardized test scores, and cognitive function ;
- improved attendance, which is positively linked to academic achievement;
- reduced food insecurity, which is linked to poor academic outcomes;
- improved nutrition, such as increased consumption of fruit, vegetables, and milk;
- improved overall health and long-term health outcomes, as well as reduction in obesity rates, anxiety, and depression.

As vital as these school nutrition programs are, too many children miss out on school meals because of the current structure. Many struggling families do not meet the eligibility criteria for no-cost meals, which for the 2023-2024 school year requires a family of four to earn less than \$55,500 annually. With the cost of living on the rise, there are too many Maryland families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs and yet do not qualify because their income exceeds this incredibly low eligibility threshold.

Now is the time for Maryland to make this critical investment in our children and communities. Schools were able to offer school meals at no cost beginning in the spring of 2020 through the 2021-2022 school year during the height of the pandemic. This trial run showed how beneficial offering meals at no cost to all students is for children, families, and schools.

Providing school meals at no cost to all students would support equity in the classroom by making sure every child has the nutrition they need to excel. These meals are just as important to students' academic success as textbooks or transportation and should be treated as a critical component of education. When students are distracted by hunger because they are unable to participate in school breakfast or lunch, they miss out on the chance to learn and benefit from the important opportunities offered by Maryland's education system. Additionally, it would ease the pressure on household food budgets and reduce administrative work for school staff by eliminating school meal debt and ending the financial burden that debt creates for families and school districts.



Hungry kids can't wait. It's time for Maryland to make Healthy School Meals for All a priority and join the growing list of states that have guaranteed all students have access to the healthy meals they need to grow and thrive.

As such, we thank you for your consideration and urge a favorable report on SB 579.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leah Paley".

Leah Aiello Paley, LMSW
Chief Executive Officer
Anne Arundel County Food Bank

Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony

Uploaded by: Leslie Frey

Position: FAV



Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony
SB579 - Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion
February 14, 2024
SUPPORT

TO: The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair; The Honorable Jim Rosapepe, Vice Chair; and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Dr. Jeffery Johnson, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board (CAB), the County’s local, state, and federally designated anti-poverty group, is in full support of SB579 and asks the Committee for a favorable report. This bill would ensure that all children attending schools that participate in the free and reduced meals program will have access to free breakfast and lunch on every school day.

As the governing body, along with the Head Start Parent Policy Council, of the Montgomery County Head Start Program that serves 648 low-income children and their families, we are well aware of the importance of school nutrition programs and recognize the role that school meals play in providing improved access to nutritious meals for low-income school children. Of note, over one-third of children in Montgomery County Public Schools are eligible for Free and Reduced Meals.¹ Not all eligible students receive these meals, though. Universal access will ensure that all children have access to nutritious meals, even if the parent or guardian did not complete the application in a timely fashion. Universal access eliminates the stigma; it is no longer obvious who is low-income and receiving a free or reduced cost meal—all students are receiving the same meal.

Support for food and nutrition programs, including school meals programs, has been a longstanding priority for our board because food insecurity remains a serious challenge here in Montgomery County and across the state. The food insecurity rate in Maryland is 9%, meaning that 543,650 residents struggle with *a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life.*² It is important to note that food insecurity is compounded in areas like Montgomery County and so many parts of the state, where the cost of living is extremely high, and wages have not kept up. According to the Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard, a household with two working adults, one preschooler, and one school-age child would need to earn \$122,943 annually to cover their basic necessities, over four times the federal poverty level.³

We ask the Committee for a favorable report and ask that you consider other policies that will reduce food insecurity in Maryland.

¹<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/food-and-nutrition/about-us/#:~:text=Approximately%2035%25%20of%20MCPS%20students,gap%E2%80%9D%20when%20school%20is%20out>

² <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/overall/maryland>

³https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/MDMontCo2023_SSS.pdf

SB 579 - MoCo_Elrich_FAV (GA 24).pdf

Uploaded by: Marc Elrich

Position: FAV



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

February 14, 2024

TO: The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Marc Elrich
County Executive

RE: Senate Bill 579, *Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion*
Support

I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 579, *Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion*, which requires that the State provide funding to supplement federal aid to cover the cost of providing free meals to all students in schools that participate in the National School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs. Those programs provide federal funding to reimburse school systems for the cost of serving free or reduced-price meals to eligible low-income students. Under the bill, all students would receive free meals in any school that receives federal reimbursement for free or reduced-price meals.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought increased attention to the unacceptably high number of Maryland families that struggle with food insecurity; a number which has remained alarmingly elevated over the past three years. As hundreds of thousands of Maryland children and families continue down the long road to recovery from the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, there has never been a more important time to make significant investments in the school meal programs.

Extensive research has shown that access to healthy meals improves students' educational experiences, academic achievement, and social and emotional wellbeing. By providing school meals at no cost to all students, Maryland would be supporting equity in the classroom and making sure every child has the nutrition they need in order to excel. These meals are just as important to students' academic success as textbooks or transportation and should be treated as a critical component of education. When students are distracted by hunger because they were unable to participate in school breakfast or lunch, they miss out on the chance to learn and benefit from the important opportunities offered by Maryland's education system.

The Honorable Guy Guzzone

Re: Senate Bill 579

February 14, 2024

Hungry kids can't learn. Requiring the State to provide supplemental funding to ensure that every child has access to a nutritious school breakfast and lunch every day is a smart and effective investment in Maryland's communities and future.

I respectfully request that the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee give this bill a favorable report.

cc: Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee

SB 579_MD Center on Economic Policy_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Mark Huffman

Position: FAV



Expanding Access to No-Cost School Meals Will Boost Health and Learning For Maryland Students

Position Statement Supporting Senate Bill 579

Given before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

In times of uncertainty and increase economic anxiety in Maryland households reducing the financial strain on low-income families would be a significant relief. Requiring the cost of providing school lunch to be covered by federal reimbursement and state funding would improve health and education for Maryland children. **For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports SB 579.**

School meal programs are a critical resource that provide children with the nutrition they need to thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in both the short and long term. However, the labeling of children and families who benefit from such programs creates social barriers. Maryland can address this by offering school breakfast and lunch to all students, ensuring every child is able to get a healthy meal at school while also eliminating the stigma of these critical programs.

Additionally, SB 579 will help to address the growing food insecurity impacting families. As of October, more than 445,000 Marylanders reported that they didn't always have enough food, highlighting the ongoing need for robust food assistance in the state.ⁱ Covering the cost of breakfast and lunch for all Maryland students will help to ensure that fewer of our students face fewer struggles in or out of the classroom.

Extensive research has linked participation in school meals to a number of benefits:

- Improved academic achievement, standardized test scores, and cognitive function;
- Improved attendance, which is positively linked to academic achievement;
- Reduced food insecurity, which is linked to poor academic outcomes;
- Improved nutrition, such as increased consumption of fruit, vegetables, and milk;
- Improved overall health and long-term health outcomes, as well as reduction in obesity rates, anxiety, and depression.

Providing school meals at no cost to all students and families in the state for an additional school year is a smart and effective investment in Maryland communities. **For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Budget and Taxation Committee to make a favorable report on SB 579.**

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 579

Bill summary

SB 579 alters the standards of the State Free Feeding Program, beginning in fiscal year 2025, to require free school meals for all students. The bill also provides state funding to cover the costs of providing free school meals.

Background

In 2021 and 2022, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided waivers to schools across the country, allowing them to serve free school meals to all students. As many Marylanders continue to struggle with high costs for food, rent and other essentials, this ability to serve all students nutritious meals, regardless of income, needs to be extended.

Too many children in need are left out due to the current school meals program structure. To qualify for free school meals, a student's family must be living at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, which translates to annual income of less than \$35,000 for a family of four for the 2021–2022 school year. Similarly, a family of four must have an annual income of around \$49,000 or less to qualify for reduced-price meals. Because the eligibility threshold for these programs are so low, many Maryland families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs do not qualify.

Equity Implications

Policies in the past have led to a system of unequal opportunities for marginalized groups within Maryland. Although the most obviously racially discriminatory policies have long been overturned or mitigated, the impact of these policies continue to persist in both society and public policy and have led to significant racial and health disparities. Families with children, Marylanders of color, and people with disabilities are all more likely to qualify for and need food assistance programs because of these barriers. Children of color experience much higher rates of economic insecurity and poverty and are more likely to benefit from expanded access to school meals.

Impact

Senate Bill 579 would likely **improve racial and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ Household Pulse Survey, Week 63, Food Sufficiency and Food Insecurity Table 1, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/hhp/hhp63.html>

SB 579 Klatko WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Klatko

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

February 14, 2024

Good afternoon Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee.

My name is Mary Klatko. I am the State Legislative Co-Chair of the Maryland School Nutrition Association. I am writing today to express my strong support for SB 579 and that of our entire organization, Maryland School Nutrition Association comprised of all persons working in the School Food and Nutrition Service Programs.

The purpose of this bill is to serve all students a healthy, nutritious breakfast and lunch each day at no cost to them as part of their school day experience.

This program is needed for many reasons but the one closest to the school system's mission is support for the student's education. The Maryland Legislature has shown strong support for the Blueprint for Education. The Universal Free Breakfast and Lunch Program is the best support for students in their educational experience by helping them get ready to learn because "A Hungry Child Cannot learn!"

We found during Covid that when we feed all students both meals at no cost to them that many good things happened in the school environment such as a significant reduction in discipline referrals according to a study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the US Census Bureau.

Current Research Reviews have found that Universal Free School Meals are associated with: Better attendance; Less tardiness; More ability to focus on and participate in classes; Improved test scores and Improved diet quality.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and express the strong support of the Maryland School Nutrition Association for SB 579.

SB 579 Klatko WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Klatko

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

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SB 579 Klatko WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Klatko

Position: FAV

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SB 579 Klatko WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Klatko

Position: FAV

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Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

February 14, 2024

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SB 579_ Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfas

Uploaded by: Mary Pat Fannon

Position: FAV



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director
1217 S. Potomac Street
Baltimore, MD 21224
410-935-7281
marypat.fannon@pssam.org

BILL: SB 579
TITLE: Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion
DATE: February 14, 2024
POSITION: Support
COMMITTEE: Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents’ Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **supports** Senate Bill 579.

This bill requires the State Board of Education to ensure that by fiscal 2026 schools that participate, respectively, in the federal School Breakfast Program must offer a free breakfast to all students and in the National School Lunch Program must offer a free lunch to all students. Beginning in fiscal 2026, the State is responsible for reimbursing a local board of education or a participating nonpublic school for the cost of offering free breakfasts and lunches meeting U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines. The State must (1) for schools participating in the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) pay the difference between the federal funds allocated to those schools and the cost of offering each student a meal, and (2) for other eligible schools, pay the difference for each student between the USDA free meal rate and paid meal rate. Some provisions exempting elementary schools from the requirement to provide a free breakfast are repealed.

PSSAM strongly supports this legislation and the State’s generous participation. Based on our experiences during Covid in feeding students and families, we are extremely confident that all twenty-four local school systems will be able to implement such an ambitious program effectively and efficiently.

The research on free meals for all students is vast and universally confirms the positive impact on student achievement, including academics and behavior. According to Madelein Levin and Jessie Hewins, the authors of *Universal Free School Meals: Ensuring That All Children are Able*

to Learn, their findings include increased participation in meal programs, in part due to the removal of the stigma of “free lunch.” In addition, there is no room for error in identifying food-challenged students with the elimination of paper applications. Students in school meal programs are also more likely to eat healthier foods, including fruits, vegetables, and milk. In turn, these healthier eating habits positively impact lower childhood obesity. Removing the transaction of paying for meals also results in more time for students to eat. According to Levin and Hewins, families also benefit strongly from free meal programs as it reduces their financial burden of purchasing two meals a day for their children.

Lastly, research shows that a consistently well-fed student is a better student, test-taker and participant in school. Participation in the free meal programs is also linked to fewer absences, increased attention span, decreased tardiness and behavior problems, and overall, an improved school environment.

For these reasons, PSSAM **supports** Senate Bill 579 and urges a **favorable** report.

SB0579_FAV_Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Uploaded by: Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Position: FAV



"Cultivating a collaborative, sustainable, and equitable food system for all Maryland communities."

February 12, 2024
2024 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
SB0579 Primary and Secondary Education -
Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal
Expansion

BILL: SB0579: Universal School Meals
COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means Committee
POSITION: Testimony of Support of Senate Bill 0579

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record in support of Senate Bill 0579.

This letter is submitted on behalf of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council. The Food System Resiliency Council was established by the Maryland General Assembly during the 2021 legislative session to bring together 33 appointed council members from across the state, all with different points of entry and expertise to work toward a more resilient food system and address the food insecurity crisis due to COVID-19. One of the key mandates of this Council is to develop equitable and sustainable policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of Maryland's food system.

One way this can be achieved is by providing free meals to all Maryland students. This bill is necessary for investing in the health and academic success of students in Maryland.

Oftentimes, school meals are the most reliable source of food for students. A stable diet helps students focus in class which sets them up for success throughout the school day. This bill would also ease the pressure on household food budgets and reduce administrative work for school staff by eliminating school meal debt - ending the financial burden that debt creates for families and school districts. Like desks, textbooks, and transportation, school meals are vital to student success and deserve investment.

We urge Maryland to join states such as California, Colorado, Maine, and Massachusetts in adopting universal school meals. This bill will benefit students, their families, and the school system financially all while supporting the academic success of Maryland's youth.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of SB0579.

Michael J. Wilson

Co-Chair, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

SB 579 Doran WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Megan Doran

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

February 14, 2024

Good afternoon Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee.

My name is Megan Doran. I am the Past President of the Maryland School Nutrition Association. I am here today to express the strong support for SB 579 by our entire statewide organization in all Maryland school districts. We are the program operators, managers, cooks and servers in each school and district.

The purpose of this bill is the universal expansion of the breakfast and lunch programs to all primary and secondary students in Maryland regardless of household income.

Passing this bill would be helpful to the students and community of St. Mary's County. Research has shown that participation in school meals has a sizable impact on students' educational attainment. Access to free school meals in particular improves student health and attendance, reduces disciplinary infractions, and increases test scores among marginalized groups of students. Free meals also can reduce lunch stigma and school administrative burdens.

I, Megan Doran, am in support of this bill as Past President of the Maryland School Nutrition Association and Director of Food and Nutrition Services at St. Mary's County Public Schools.

Thank you Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee for allowing me to testify.

SB 579 Doran WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Megan Doran

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

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SB 579 Doran WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Megan Doran

Position: FAV

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Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

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SB 579 Doran WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Megan Doran

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

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Thank you Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee for allowing me to testify.

SB0579_FAV_Montgomery County Food Council .pdf

Uploaded by: Michelle Caruso

Position: FAV



February 12, 2024

2024 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
SB0579: Universal School Meals

BILL: SB0579: Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation

POSITION: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0579

BILL ANALYSIS: Altering the standards of the State Free Feeding Program, beginning in fiscal year 2025, to require that if a school participates in the federal School Breakfast Program or the National School Lunch Program, then each student in the school must be offered a meal at no cost to the student; providing for the reimbursement rate at which the State shall pay county boards and participating nonpublic schools for the meals offered to students; etc.

Dear Chair Guzzone and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

The Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) urges you to SUPPORT this bill to provide free meals to Maryland students. This legislation is a necessary investment for the health and academic success of students in Maryland.

For many students, school is the most reliable source of food and school meals provide both financial and emotional relief to families. A stable diet of nutritious foods allows students to better focus in class and sets them up for success throughout the school day. By providing meals that follow USDA guidelines to all students, this bill ensures that every student will receive nutritious school meals, while removing the stigma associated with participating in school meal programs. Like desks, textbooks, and transportation to and from school, meals should be considered an essential part of the educational experience in our state.

During the 2021-22 school year, over 95,000 Montgomery County students ate school lunch, and more than 50% of them received free or reduced-priced meals. This number does not



P.O. Box 32212 | Bethesda, MD 20814 | 310-637-7071
mocofoodcouncil.org | info@mocofoodcouncil.org

begin to represent the entirety of need in the county. Due to the high cost of living in Montgomery County, there are many students who face food insecurity but are ineligible for free and reduced-price meals due to their household income being above 185% of the federal poverty level. This gap causes food insecurity for many families across the county.

In addition to decreasing food insecurity, universal school meals will address a serious financial issue facing our schools. Knowing the critical nature of school meals, schools often provide food to students who do not have sufficient funds to cover the cost. In doing so, they accrue unrecoverable debt. In addition, there is a huge burden on the school system in keeping track of these debts and attempting to recover the funds without stigmatizing students and their families. This legislation would eradicate both of these issues.

We strongly support this bill to establish universal school meals at participating public and nonpublic schools, and create a system to support students enrolled in schools that are not eligible. Studies have shown that students who skip breakfast have lower attendance rates and academic performance than students who eat breakfast². Providing all students with access to free, nutritious meals can help bridge this gap of academic achievement. To best ensure the future success of all Montgomery County students, and students in the state of Maryland as a whole, it is vital to remove barriers to food access and academic success. Other states such as Colorado, Massachusetts, Maine, and California have adopted universal school meals, and we want to see Maryland join this group. **For these reasons, the Montgomery County Food Council supports SB0557 and urges a FAVORABLE REPORT for this bill.**

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources

For more information, please contact Michelle Caruso, Director of Policy and Partnerships, at the email and phone number below.



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mocofoodcouncil.org | info@mocofoodcouncil.org

SB0579_Written Testimony_Favorable_MdPHA.docx.2.14

Uploaded by: Oluwatosin Olateju

Position: FAV



Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy ***Vision:*** Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 579
Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion
Committees: Budget and Taxation; Education, Energy, and the Environment
By: Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA)
Hearing Date: February 14, 2024

Chair Guzzone, Chair Feldman, and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee, and the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 579. This bill would require that schools participating in the federal School Breakfast Program, or the National School Lunch Program offer a meal to each student at no cost to the student, whereby a reimbursement rate shall be provided to allow the State to pay county boards and participating nonpublic schools for the free meals offered to the students.

The school environment plays a vital role in children’s diets and overall health, and policies for universal free school meals can contribute to positive child health outcomes. Fortunately, a large body of research assessing universal free school meals found positive associations with diet quality, food security, and academic performance for low-income and food-insecure households.^{1,2} Access to healthy school meals is a critical cornerstone to improving chronic health conditions and reducing educational inequities among young people.³ Furthermore, free school meals augment overall household resources and provide children with a regular source of nutritious meals.

Food insecurity is a significant public health problem affecting children in the United States.⁴ Food insecurity disrupts food intake or eating patterns due to a lack of money or resources, and has been associated with adverse health, social, and academic outcomes among children. In Maryland, 543,650 people are facing hunger - and of them 167,020 are children. Also, 1 in 8 children in Maryland face hunger.⁵ Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated food insecurity in Maryland making it difficult for charitable programs to fully support those facing hunger.

¹ Katherine Ralston, Katie Treen, Alisha Coleman-Jensen, and Joanne Guthrie. Children's Food Security and USDA Child Nutrition Programs. United States Department of Agriculture. Summary. https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84003/eib-174_summary.pdf

² Cohen, J. F. W., Hecht, A. A., McLoughlin, G. M., Turner, L., & Schwartz, M. B. (2021). Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: A systematic review. *Nutrients*, 13(3), 911. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13030911>

³ Seligman HK, Lararia BA, Kushel MB. Food insecurity is associated with chronic disease among low-income NHANES participants. *J Nutr*. 2010;140(2):304-10. Available from: <http://doi.org/10.3945/jn.109.112573>

⁴ Thomas, M. M. C., Miller, D. P., & Morrissey, T. W. (2019). Food insecurity and child health. *Pediatrics*, 144(4), e20190397. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-0397>

⁵ Maryland | Feeding America. (n.d.). Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maryland>

Additionally, the association between poor nutrition and obesity continue to be significant. Hence, it is crucial that reimbursable school meals contain a fruit or a vegetable⁶. Lastly, government assistance programs that promote free school meals must be established and sustained to help bridge the meal gap.

Thank you for your consideration and we urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 579.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA)
PO Box 7045 · 6801 Oak Hall Ln · Columbia, MD 21045-9998
GetInfo@MdPHA.org www.mdpha.org 443.475.0242

⁶ Terry-McElrath, Y. M., O'Malley, P. M., & Johnston, L. D. (2015). Potential impact of national school nutritional environment policies: Cross-sectional associations with us secondary student overweight/obesity, 2008-2012. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 169(1), 78–85. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2014.2048>

agudah testimony - SB 579- meals program- fav - 20

Uploaded by: Rabbi Ariel Sadwin

Position: FAV



SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 14, 2024

SENATE BILL 579

**PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION – BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PROGRAMS – UNIVERSAL
EXPANSION**

TESTIMONY OF AVI LENCZ

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, AGUDATH ISRAEL OF MARYLAND

SUPPORT

Agudath Israel of Maryland speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland, and on behalf of the 10,000 students attending 30 Jewish day schools in our great state. Many of our schools participate in the National School Lunch Program and/or the School Breakfast Program.

Food insecurity has become increasingly salient in discussions regarding improving the lot of vulnerable Marylanders. Food insecurity affects the entire family, but has a particularly negative effect on children and young adults. Without proper sustenance, students are more likely to struggle and suffer emotionally, academically, and physically. Repeated studies show that school food programs for students can lead to improved outcomes in many areas of life. Additionally, such programs can lift some of the economic burden that weighs down on parents struggling to make ends meet.

This bill would improve student health and help boost their academic outcomes. It would help educators and faculty by creating a healthy classroom environment. And it would help struggling parents by letting them know their children can receive the sustenance they need to succeed.

Universal expansion of the meals programs means that all Maryland students will be able to eat properly. We respectfully request the committee members to take an important step in guiding our state to a more equitable future by helping all Maryland students, and ask for a favorable report on Senate Bill 579.

MDCAPE Testimony - SB579 UNIV SCHOOL MEALS - FAV -

Uploaded by: Rabbi Dovid Heber

Position: FAV



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.

Testimony in support of SB0579.pdf

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0579_RichardKaplowitz_FAV
2/14//2024

Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON SB#0579 - FAVORABLE

Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

TO: Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard K. Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0579, Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

Maryland has been and continues to make investments in education to make our state the number one in education. This bill is a recognition that ensuring kids have breakfast can be crucial to their ability to learn, and the state and counties should assist every child to have that breakfast regardless of their ability to pay.

According to HealthyChildren.org ⁱ

Studies show that eating breakfast positively affects school performance. They have better concentration and more energy."

Research findings include:

- Kids who eat breakfast the morning before a standardized test have significantly higher scores in math, spelling and reading than those who don't.
- Breakfast eaters have better brain function, memory and attention.
- Eating breakfast improves kids' performance on vocabulary tests, math problems and challenging mental tasks. It also helps them deal better with frustration.

These positive outcomes can be made possible for all our children if we have the courage to make it happen. This bill recognizes those challenges for our children and ways to fix it.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0579.

ⁱ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Breakfast-for-Learning.aspx>

SB579 - Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Riya Gupta

Position: FAV



**Testimony in support of
Senate Bill 579: Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs
– Universal Expansion**

Budget and Taxation Committee

Position: Favorable

February 14, 2024

Strong Schools Maryland is a network of education advocates dedicated to ensuring the full funding and faithful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. The Blueprint guarantees a world class education for all students and commits our public school system to supporting the needs of the families they serve. Food security is a crucial component of a student’s ability to thrive and achieve. As such, **Strong Schools Maryland stands in support of Senate Bill 579.**

The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future envisions a World-Class system of public schools for our state’s students. We are making record-breaking investments in education and resources to support students for educational excellence. Through community school expansions and concentration of poverty grants, the Blueprint provides support and services that address the needs of children in communities with high poverty rates, high crime rates, and those that lack access to adequate health care and social services, with resources provided at the school level and in the community. SB 579 reflects these ideals by expanding breakfast and lunch programs in the state.

Senate Bill 579 would:

- Provide free meals to students by requiring that if a school participates in the federal School Breakfast Program or the National School Lunch Program, then each student in the school must be offered a meal at no cost;
- Support county boards and participating nonpublic schools by calculating a reimbursement for the the State to provide; and

- Expands access for students who attend schools that do not participate in federal nutrition programs by requiring the state to pay the difference in costs.

Students who experience hunger have been proven to have low performance in school, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.¹ Hungry students are more likely to score lower on standardized tests, repeat a grade, be suspended from school, get sick more often, and be hospitalized more frequently.² Maryland has now begun automatically adding students under Medicaid coverage to the free or reduced-price school lunches program. This new criteria of eligibility has identified a large blindspot in our counting of students in poverty. **We have been missing 1 in 9 students.**³

Now more than ever, we must affirm our commitment to Maryland students. Senate Bill 579 expands breakfast and lunch programs so that more students in need receive nutritious meals and local boards have the state support they need to thrive.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 579.

For more information, contact Riya Gupta at riya@strongschoolsmaryland.org

¹ [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

² [No Kid Hungry](#)

³ [DLS 2023 Fiscal Briefing](#)

SB579 - FAV - MSEA, Zwerling.pdf

Uploaded by: Samantha Zwerling

Position: FAV

FAVORABLE
Senate Bill 579
Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs –
Universal Expansion

Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 14, 2024

Samantha Zwerling
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 579, which would make meals available to all students in a school that participates in the federal School Breakfast Program or National School Lunch Program.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

“Hungry children cannot be expected to fully engage in their learning if they are distracted by their empty bellies. By ensuring that all students have access to healthy school meals, we are making a significant investment in our state’s most precious resource. Providing every child in our state with the nutritious meal their growing bodies need to thrive not only helps them be better prepared to learn, it’s also the right and humane thing to do.”
- Cheryl Bost, President, Maryland State Education Association

Educators know all too well that, for far too many of our students, the only source of a nutritious meal they might have access to in a day is at their school. Few things are more gut wrenching to educators than seeing their students suffer, particularly for the want of the sufficient amount of food their growing bodies need to survive and thrive. Hungry children experience real and lasting health impacts that can put their physical, mental, and cognitive development at risk as well as their social-emotional functioning. These impacts lead to deleterious effects such as poorer academic and behavioral outcomes for the children in our schools. Hungry children cannot be expected to fully engage in their learning if their attention is rapt by the rumbling and discomfort in their empty bellies.



This bill pairs nicely with the work the General Assembly has done through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and builds on the last decade of meal expansion bills for students. The General Assembly and education advocates have worked in tandem to bring greater focus to community schools and to provide targeted resources to students living in concentrated poverty. As we work to stand-up community schools around the state with important wrap around services, universal meals is another piece of that puzzle. Universal meals as outlined here reduce administrative burden, reduce meal shaming amongst students, and ensure that students are ready to learn with full bellies.

The State must do whatever practicable to make feeding children easier and this bill is a meaningful effort toward that goal. MSEA urges a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 579.

SB 579 Heckert WRITTEN.pdf

Uploaded by: Scott Heckert

Position: FAV



Serving Learners, Families, and the Community

CECIL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOOD & NUTRITION DEPARTMENT

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES CENTER

900 NORTH EAST ROAD • NORTH EAST, MD 21901

phone: 410.996.6257 • fax: 410.287-4652 • www.ccps.org

Jeffrey A. Lawson, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Diana B. Hawley
President, Board of Education

Testimony in support of SB 579 – The Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion.

February 14, 2024

Good afternoon Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee.

My name is Scott Heckert and I am the Director of Food & Nutrition for Cecil County Public Schools. I am writing in support of SB 579 which would make school breakfast and lunch available to all students at no cost in the State of Maryland.

School meals play such a vital role in a student's success in their academics. In our schools which participate in the USDA Community Eligibility Program we have seen improved attendance, a reduction in behavioral referrals, as well as an increase in the consumption of nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables. In addition to the direct benefits to the students, I have spoken with many parents of children who benefit from free school meals in our CEP schools. They tell me what a relief it is to their family budget to not have to purchase food for breakfast and lunch on the days that their kids are in school. This bill would make it possible for us to expand these benefits to all our students and their families in the district.

Food insecurity is a real problem for many folks in our communities. Children that deal with this reality really struggle to succeed in their academics. With all the changes that we are seeing in our state that are focused on making education better in the State of Maryland, making school meals free for all goes hand in hand with that objective. Full bellies lead to full minds. There are already several states in the United States of America that have made this leap. Its time for Maryland to jump on board and make Healthy School Meals available for all students at no cost a part of their school day.

Thank you, Chairman Feldman, Sponsor Hettleman and members of the committee for allowing me to testify.

SB579CIF_fav.pdf

Uploaded by: Steven Mandel

Position: FAV



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM (CIF) OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
BEFORE THE SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF SB 579: BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PROGRAMS - UNIVERSAL EXPANSION
FEBRUARY 14, 2024**

FAVORABLE

CIF is a coalition of three synagogues in Montgomery County, Kol Shalom, Adat Shalom, and Temple Beth Ami, that include over 1750 households and three denominations of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist. CIF serves as a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on policy issues, such as food insecurity, that relate to our shared values, including the Jewish traditions that emphasize the sanctity and primacy of human life. CIF provides this testimony in support of SB 579, which would provide State funding for free breakfasts and lunches in many Maryland schools beginning in FY 2026.

CIF recognizes that even before the COVID pandemic, there were a large number of families, particularly families of color, that struggled with food insecurity. The pandemic only increased the number of families struggling to cover basic human needs, such as food. And the Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (ERS) reports that hunger in America soared in 2022 after pandemic relief efforts wound down. The ERS found that 12.8% of U.S. households were food insecure in 2022. Moreover, children were food insecure at times during 2022 in 8.8% of U.S. households with children, up from 6.2% in 2021. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=107702>.

According to the Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC's) dashboard of August 2023 (based on the USDA Household Pulse Survey), 17.7% of Black households, 19.2% of households with high school or less education, and 12.5% of female households in Maryland are food insufficient. Recent inflation and rising food costs have been particularly challenging for families with limited incomes. School meals play a crucial role in reducing childhood hunger. Research shows that hungry children do not learn as well as children who are well nourished, and hunger also affects their physical and emotional well-being. FRAC (2021), "School Meals are Essential for Student Health and Learning," available at <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning.pdf>.

SB 579 would ensure that all schools participating in the Federal School Breakfast Program or National School Lunch Program would resume providing free breakfast and lunch to all their

students, as they did during the Covid-19 Public Health Emergency. The bill thus builds off the important investments made in the 2019 Blueprint for Maryland's Future by supporting equity in the classroom and ensuring that every child has the nutrition he or she needs in order to excel. Offering universal free meals not only assures that **each** child has a minimum level of nourishment, but also (1) removes the stigma associated with means-tested school meals programs, (2) opens the program to families not currently eligible due to the low-income cutoff, (3) ends unpaid school meal debt, and (4) eliminates administrative burdens for schools.

CIF requests a favorable report on SB 579.

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Position: FAV



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM (CIF) OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
BEFORE THE SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF SB 579: BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PROGRAMS - UNIVERSAL EXPANSION
FEBRUARY 14, 2024**

FAVORABLE

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CIF requests a favorable report on SB 579.

Susan Gross SB 579 written testimony _Breakfast an

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Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

February 14, 2024

Susan M. Gross, PhD, MPH, RDN, LDN

My name is Dr. Susan Gross. I am a nutritionist and an associate practice professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. I have been studying the impact of universal free school meals in Maryland since 2015 and I strongly support Senate Bill 579-Primary and Secondary Education-Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion, which aims to provide equitable access to healthy school meals and will ensure no student goes hungry during the school day. Additionally, this bill will support school systems, students, and their families by covering the cost of breakfast and lunch for all Maryland students.

Research shows that well-fed kids learn better and are less likely to engage in bad behaviors that are distractive to their peers. Children also go on to become the workers of the society and thus go on to make it possible for earlier generations to retire in old age.¹ The provision of healthy meals for all students will also reduce the stigma associated with not having money to pay for meals as no one will be singled out.

One strategy to bolster our child nutrition safety net in the past was to expand access to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Since 2014, CEP has allowed high-poverty schools and school districts to participate in US Department of Agriculture meal programs to offer universal free breakfast and lunch.

Moreover, my research found that after the adoption of CEP by Baltimore City Public Schools, students in participating schools were nearly three times less likely to be food insecure compared to students attending a CEP eligible, but nonparticipating school, even after adjusting for race/ethnicity and education level of the parent/caregiver.² My research consistently shows that families of students in non-CEP districts who could not pay for the school meals and did not qualify for free meals often had trouble coming up with the money for school provided meals on a regular basis. Maryland students in non-CEP districts complained of experiencing shaming in the cafeteria when they could not afford to pay for meals at school. Additionally, children and adolescents fear the stigma of being identified by their peers as poor or needy, which often leads to skipping meals.^{3,4}

During 2020 and 2021, the American Rescue Plan provided flexibility for all schools to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students. Maryland rose to this challenge, seamlessly provided these meals to all its students, and strengthened our safety net for all families. Unfortunately, this flexibility expired in the Fall of 2022, and in 2023 once again, students and families in Maryland faced uncertainty about breakfast and lunch on school days and schools in Maryland are once again facing school meal debt.

In 2023, Maryland expanded eligibility for free meals by including Medicaid participation as a criterion. School administrators across Maryland used this expansion of eligible students to adopt CEP. Unfortunately, for some school districts, the reimbursement for school meals from USDA was still not enough for them to go forward with CEP adoption. In the past year, I have been interviewing food service directors across Maryland about adoption of CEP. One food service administrator commented “So for us to go CEP, we have to find that money somewhere else. Which in food service, that is not an easy thing to do, which is what prevents so many districts from making that decision” and another “So, if we provide more funding for this program, we can do a better job at running it, but without funding, we can't pay workers. Without adequate funding, we can't buy quality food and have dependable vendor contracts. We're providing the healthiest meals that are out there at a mass level. So, we need to recognize that this is a worthwhile investment.” This bill SB 579- Universal Meal Expansion build on the success of CEP by providing universal free breakfast and lunch in all schools across Maryland. In 2022-23, 11 of 28 eligible Maryland school districts were eligible but did not adopt CEP, 56 of 138 schools eligible but not at a level that achieves full meal reimbursement (40-50% ISP) did not adopt CEP, and there were

12 schools in Maryland that were at full reimbursement level who did not adopt CEP.⁵ The funding from SB 579 would bridge the funding gap for these schools and increase CEP adoption across Maryland and allow our schools to use all of the federal funds available to provide universal meals to their students.

With Universal Meal Expansion students will have the security of knowing that at least two meals per day are available to them each school day, and it will provide the security and stability they need to learn and grow.

Maryland has the opportunity to reduce food insecurity, meal debt shaming and stigmatization of Maryland students and expand the availability of healthy school meals through SB 579.

As such, I urge a favorable report on SB 579 in order to support students, families, schools, and entire communities as we move beyond the pandemic.

The opinions expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my thoughts.

¹ Kleinman RE, et al. Pediatrics. 1998. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.101.1.e3>

² Gross S, et al. J Hunger Envir Nutr Oct 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19.320248.2019.1679318>

³ Müller K, et al. Eur J Clin Nutr. 2013 Feb;67(2):185-9.

⁴ Hecht A, et al. American journal of public health 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305743>

⁵ Food Research & Action Center. Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free School. School Year 2022-2023. May 2023. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/cep-report-2023.pdf>

SB 579 Testimony.pdf

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Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL SB 579

Primary and Secondary Education Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion *Budget and Taxation Committee* February 14, 2024

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 579, which allocates state funding to cover the costs of school breakfast and lunch to all primary and secondary students beginning in FY 2026. This bill will help reduce child hunger, remove the stigma surrounding school lunch programs, and lower the cost burden and accrual of school lunch debt.

Providing school breakfast and lunch at no cost will decrease the risk of food insecurity. School breakfast programs decrease the risk of food insecurity and breakfast skipping, especially among low-income children.^{1,2,3} School participation in the National School Lunch Program is associated with around a 14% reduction in the risk of food insecurity.⁴ SB 579 will further reduce the risk of food insecurity by providing access to families who struggle to make ends meet, and yet do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals because their household income is above the incredibly low eligibility threshold for free or reduced-price meals.

Offering free breakfast and lunch to children will help reduce the shame and embarrassment experienced by children and families. When children do not have enough money on their accounts, they are asked for cash or required to put items back, leading to unnecessary embarrassment. This is heartbreaking to a parent who never wants their children to feel this way. Parents also feel panic when they receive an email stating that their student's account is less than zero and must be addressed as soon as possible. One member of our organization received this email to find there was a debt of \$0.75. Fortunately, they had the ability to pay. Imagine the feelings invoked when the debt is an amount a family is incapable of paying. SB 579 will be a big step in eliminating these experiences for families.

This bill encourages children to look towards their schools for sustenance and community. One member of our organization worked in a Wellness Center at a Maryland high school where over half of students were receiving free and reduced-priced meals and one fifth were emergent English learners.⁵ Many of the students' parents did not speak English and were not aware of the free and reduced-priced meals program. Many students had trouble feeling connected to the school, and would leave at lunch and not come back. This bill sends a message to children that they are safe and wanted at our schools. Students who ran out of money on their accounts would come to the Wellness Center to ask for a bag of chips. A bag of chips is not a lunch. Our students are facing rising challenges daily. The price of a meal at school should not be a factor in their school day.



For more information, please contact
Sheva Spangler or Rebecca Spiro
umswasc@gmail.com

As of September 2023 California, Maine, Colorado, Minnesota, New Mexico, Vermont, Michigan, and Massachusetts have all passed free Healthy School Meals for All policies. It's time for Maryland to join the growing list of states that have guaranteed all students have access to the healthy meals they need to grow and thrive.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 579.

Respectfully,

Student Advocates for Social Change
umswasc@gmail.com

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

¹Bartfeld, J., Kim, M., Ryu, J. H., & Ahn, H. (2009). The School Breakfast Program participation and impacts. Contractor and Cooperator Report,54. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture.

²Bartfeld, J. S., & Ahn, H. M. (2011). The School Breakfast Program strengthens household food security among low-income households with elementary school children. *Journal of Nutrition*, 141(3), 470–475.

³Bartfeld, J. S., & Ryu, J. H. (2011). The School Breakfast Program and breakfast-skipping among Wisconsin elementary school children. *Social Service Review*, 85(4), 619–634.

⁴Huang, J., & Barnidge, E., (2016). Low-income children's participation in the National School Lunch Program and household food insufficiency. *Social Science & Medicine*, 150, 8–14.

⁵Wheaton High School (2022 – 2023). Montgomery County Public Schools.

<https://ww2.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/regulatoryaccountability/glance/currentyear/schools/04782.pdf>