

SB 425

Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program – Alterations (Maryland Meals for Achievement Flexibility Act of 2024) Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee February 7, 2024

SUPPORT

Senate Bill 425 enables flexibility for elementary schools to serve breakfast in any broadly accessible part of the school, including from “Grab and Go” carts, which is a flexibility already in place for middle and high schools.

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. Last year, more than 1 in 3 Maryland families making less than \$35,000 a year were 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 more than 1 in 3 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 606,000 meals at 33 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 we distributed the equivalent of almost 2.5 million meals last year. 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, breakfast.

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 ensuring that schools who want to participate in the MMFA program can provide breakfast to students in the way that makes the most practical sense – whether in the classroom or “grab-and-go,” it 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 425.