



March 25, 2024

Testimony of Laura Hale
American Heart Association

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

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Honorable Members of the Ways And Means Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. The American Heart Association extends its support for SB 579 Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion being turned into a study bill. We would prefer the legislation to pass as written, but support this move to a study as a step towards ultimate passage of the legislation. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association.

Studies are an important tool of the legislature to take a nonpartisan deep dive into the literature that is available. With this study, the legislature will be more able to look at Maryland data to get an more accurate estimate on cost on implementation and to look at how local CEP programs have seen an increase in participation. All of these can be key measure to better determine cost of the program (and what is already covered and can be covered with Federal dollars).

Additionally, there are other areas that could be useful to the legislature for review, including how this program could support the goals of the Blueprint For Maryland’s Future and other ideas (see language below).

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

(c) The study required under subsection

(b) of this section shall examine the potential impact of a universal free school meals program on:

- (1) the academic performance of students in the State;
- (2) the finances of the families of students and the associated socioeconomic impact;
- (3) the goals of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future relating to academic performance and attendance;
- (4) student attendance, absenteeism, and tardiness;
- (5) student health, nutrition, and diet;
- (6) student unpaid meal debt; and
- (7) best practices for implementation of a universal free school meals program.

(d) The study required under subsection

(b) of this section shall also examine states that have implemented a universal free school meals program, including:

- (1) details of the programs that have been implemented;
- (2) impacts of the programs on the items listed under subsection
- (c) of this section; and (3) best practices and lessons learned from the implemented programs.