

SHELLY HETTLEMAN
Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake
and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 203
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3131 · 301-858-3131
800-492-7122 Ext. 3131
Shelly.Hettleman@senate.state.md.us

The Senate of Maryland ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN SB425 MARYLAND MEALS FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN-CLASSROOM BREAKFAST PROGRAM - ALTERATIONS (MARYLAND MEALS FOR ACHIEVEMENT FLEXIBILITY ACT OF 2024)

Far too many children face food insecurity in the U.S. One in eight children in Maryland face hunger, according to Feeding America. Maryland has been a leading state in addressing this crisis by creating the Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program, which provides breakfast to all students in schools where at least 40% of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals for the federal program.

In its current form, the program allows food to be served in any broadly accessible part of the school in middle and high schools, but not in elementary schools. For elementary school kids who may arrive late to school, this restriction can limit their access to free breakfast. This bill would enable local decision-makers to provide access to breakfast through services like Grab and Go carts, rather than being restricted to food service in the classroom. My home school district, Baltimore County, has asked for this added flexibility to fully realize the incredible impact of this program.

In 2023, the Maryland General Assembly passed a bill expanding the budget of this program, in recognition of its importance in ensuring that no child goes hungry. The Breakfast Program allows kids and teachers to focus on learning, gets food to kids in families experiencing food insecurity at home and serves over 258,000 Maryland students, according to No Kid Hungry.

We all were reminded about the importance of in-school meal programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, when those services were interrupted, putting kids at risk of not receiving any of the meals their families had relied on to keep their heads above water. We must do what we can to protect and expand these services. This is especially true as the cost of food continues to rise. The positive impact of the program is clear: schools enrolled in Maryland Meals for Achievement have better educational performance, improved health and a decrease in discipline problems. Providing Breakfast After the Bell has increased breakfast participation and consumption and thereby enhanced the impact of this important program.

We owe it to all our students to do everything we can to get them fed, including allowing food service in any broadly accessible part of school. Ultimately, we want to reach as many kids in need as possible with the resources this state has already committed.