



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

**Ways and Means Committee
Position: Favorable with Amendments**

March 27, 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 with amendments to restore the original provisions of the bill.**

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. While Strong Schools Maryland recognises the needs for the cost estimate survey, we believe that critical components of SB 579 have been removed from the proposed legislation.

Strong Schools Maryland respectfully recommends that along with mandating a cost estimate report, Senate Bill 579 also:

- 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

- Expand access for students who attend schools that do not participate in federal nutrition programs by requiring the state to pay the difference in costs, as reflected in the original bill language.

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

Now more than ever, we must affirm our commitment to Maryland students. Senate Bill 579, with our recommended amendments, would expand 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 with amendments on Senate Bill 579.

For more information, contact Kenzie Funk at kenzie@strongschoolsmaryland.org

¹ [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

² [No Kid Hungry](#)