

Policy Foundation of Maryland

Committee: Budget and Taxation, Education, Energy, and the Environment

Testimony on: SB0579 - Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion Report

SPONSOR: Senator Guzzone

Organization: Policy Foundation of Maryland, Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Sarahia Benn (CEO/PRESIDENT) PFOM

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 27, 2023 1PM

Chair and Members of the Committee,

Policy Foundation of Maryland is a statewide grassroots organization focused on State and County level legislation and policies that impacts Black, Brown, Marginalized, low income communities and Veterans affairs. Health and education related legislation is of massive importance to these communities particularly due to how impacted these communities have been historically and currently particularly in for multiply residents in rural areas.

My name is Sarahia Benn, CEO/President of the Policy Foundation of Maryland (PFOM) and representative of the Maryland Legislative Coalition, a non-profit organization with over 30,000 members across the state. We are a grassroots organization, composed of dedicated advocates who firmly believe in the power of education and the well-being of our children.

Strong Support for School Meals Programs

The PFOM strongly supports Senate Bill 0579, which proposes the expansion of the federal School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs to offer universal free meals to all students in participating schools. We commend Senator Guzzone for sponsoring this critical legislation.

Combating Hunger and Improving Learning

Our organization is composed of former and current educators so we know firsthand the undeniable link between proper nutrition and a child's ability to learn and thrive. By ensuring all students have access to nutritious meals at school, regardless of their family's economic background, Maryland can combat childhood hunger and its devastating consequences. These programs are investments in our future generation's health, academic success, and overall well-being. It is Maryland's investment.

Beyond Existing Programs

While the existing School Breakfast and Lunch Programs are commendable, they often leave a gap unfilled. Many children who fall outside the specific eligibility criteria still experience food insecurity. SB0579 addresses this gap by ensuring all students have access to these vital meals.

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

By providing a stable source of nourishment, we can create a more conducive learning environment for all students. This not only improves their academic performance but also helps break the cycle of poverty by fostering better health and a brighter future.

Investment in Our Future

We acknowledge the potential budgetary concerns regarding the expansion of these programs. However, we believe this investment in our children's health and education will yield significant long-term benefits. A well-nourished and healthy student population translates to a more productive workforce and a stronger Maryland in the years to come.

For these compelling reasons, the PFOM urges the committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on SB0579. We believe this legislation is a critical step forward in ensuring all Maryland students have access to the nutritious meals they need to succeed in school and in life.

For these reasons, I urge an **FAVORABLE REPORT** on **SB0579**.

Respectfully submitted,



Sarahia Benn
(Policy Foundation of Maryland, Maryland Legislative Coalition)

(Dedicated to Black History All Year Round)

“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhumane.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.