

Testimony of Etienne Melcher Philbin in support of Senate Bill 828
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February 18, 2020

My name is Etienne Melcher Philbin and I am a Senior Policy Analyst at the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). FRAC applauds Senator McCray and Maryland Hunger Solutions for identifying tangible steps that Maryland can take to expand access to summer meal programs with the passage of Senate Bill 828.

Increasing participation in the Summer Food Service Program is critical to ensure the health and well-being of low-income children when school is not in session. The SFSP provides free meals and snacks to children 18 and under at sites located in low-income communities or serving primarily low-income children. Most summer meal sites also provide activities that keep children learning, active, and safe when school is not in session. Combined, these two components – quality nutrition and programming – result in children returning to school in the fall well-nourished and ready to learn.

Despite ongoing efforts, the Summer Nutrition Programs are still not meeting the need we know exists. In Maryland, the Summer Nutrition Programs served lunch to nearly 65,425 children on an average day in July 2018; an increase of about 1,700 children from the previous summer. Despite this modest increase, Maryland is still only reaching 22 low-income children in the summer for every 100 who ate school lunch during the school year.

Summer meal sponsors often face unique operational challenges due to the relative short duration of the program and diversity of organizations that participate. **To address this, USDA has historically issued nationwide flexibilities and nationwide waivers of program regulations to facilitate sponsor and site participation and decrease paperwork burdens on both State agencies and sponsors.**

Many of the waivers addressed in Senate Bill 828 have been in place for over 10 years and have been critical to reaching current participation levels in Maryland. For example, waiving the requirement that experienced sites and sponsors conduct first week site visits allows sponsors to target their monitoring resources to sites that need additional oversight. Allowing all sponsors to utilize offer versus serve is an important strategy for reducing food waste and food costs. Waiving meal service time requirements allows sponsors to better adapt to the unique communities they serve, and allowing all sponsors to qualify using area eligibility means more sites can participate.

It is important to note that the rescission of these waivers on the national level was a response to the process in which they were issued, not the content. Many sponsors have fully incorporated the flexibilities provided by the waivers into their planning and program budgets, making applying for waivers critical to maintaining their SFSP operations.

Maryland has an important opportunity to be a strong leader once again in the expansion of Summer Food Service Program moving forward by reinstating waivers that have been available in the past and proven to grow participation. By submitting waivers for these

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summer policies on behalf of all sponsors, the state will reduce duplicative requests from sponsors and promote overall program integrity and efficiency.

Again, FRAC applauds the commitment of Senator McCray, Maryland Hunger Solutions, Maryland State Department of Education, and the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs committee to making sure that all Maryland children have access to the nutrition they need during the summer months. **I urge the committee to support Senate Bill 828.**

Respectfully submitted,

Etienne Melcher Philbin