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SB 828

State Department of Education - Summer Food Service
Program - Regulatory Waivers (Summer Meals Waiver Act)
Hearing of the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
February 18, 2020

SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health Rights Project supports policies and practices that promote the overall health of Marylanders struggling to make ends meet, with the explicit goal of promoting strategies that work to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes. PJC strongly supports SB 828, which would require the Maryland Department of Education (MSDE) to submit a waiver to the free Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), annually on behalf of certain sponsors.

Food insecurity hinders the ability of children to thrive. 16.3% of children under the age of 18 are living in households that experience limited or uncertain availability of nutritious food at some point during the year.¹ Hunger has a devastating impact on the health and development of children. Children living in food insecure households experience increased hospitalizations, poor health, developmental risks and behavior problems.² They are also more likely to repeat a grade, come late to school, or be absent from school.³ Many children in food-insecure households rely on free and reduced price meals during the school year to supplement their nutrition. However, food insecurity in low-income children is exacerbated during the summer months when they do not have access to free or reduced-price school meals.⁴

SB 828 would help address food insecurity in school-aged children. In 2018, the U.S. Department of Agriculture rescinded waivers that provided flexibilities to summer meal sponsors in program administration. MSDE failed to submit a state-wide waiver request on behalf of Maryland SFSP sponsors in summer 2019 despite the pleas of

¹ Hunger Facts, No Kid Hungry, <https://www.nokidhungry.org/who-we-are/hunger-facts> (last visited on February 5, 2019).

² Child Hunger Facts, Feeding America, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/child-hunger-facts> (last visited on February 5, 2019).

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

advocates and the documented devastating effects that hunger can have on school-aged children. As a result, many sponsors were unable to provide as many summer meals as they had in previous years. SB 828, if passed, would create a tool to effectively address childhood hunger during the summer months. By requiring MSDE to submit a waiver to the SFSP on behalf of sponsors, SB 828 would ensure that children are provided healthy meals during the summer, thereby improving the health outcomes of Maryland's children.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **SB 828**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 x 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.