



To: Hon. Chair Guzzone and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Hon. Chair Pinsky and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Hon. Chair McIntosh and Members of the House Appropriations Committee
Hon. Chair Kaiser and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee

Re: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1000 and House Bill 1300
Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Implementation

Date: February 17, 2020

The Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland is a coalition of non-profits, community groups, advocates, faith communities, and public agencies that was founded in 2008. The Partnership works to increase food security and leveraging nutrition programs is our key strategy. We focus on enhancing food access through school breakfast, school lunch, afterschool meals, and summer meals, as well as the Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) program, Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), Women, Infants and Children's Program (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

We support SB1000/HB1300, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

- The Partnership supports the recommendations in SB1000/HB1300 to **expand access to Early Childhood Education** opportunities as this simultaneously expands access to the critical safety net meal programs.
- The Partnership also supports recommendations in SB1000/HB1300 to **improve college and career readiness** as important strategies to reduce poverty and food insecurity.
- The Partnership supports recommendations in SB1000/HB1300 to **expand Community Schools** as they increase resources and support available to schools and communities. Community School Coordinators identify resources and coordinate programs such as food pantries, farmers markets, and outreach for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment.

In addition, we urge you to consider the following recommendations so that all students have the fuel they need to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them.

Members of the Policy Committee of the Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland

Advocates for Children and Youth • Capital Area Food Bank • Critical Issues Forum • Family League of Baltimore
Maryland Association for Elementary School Principals • Maryland Farmers Market Association
Maryland Food Bank • Maryland Hunger Solutions • Maryland Out of School Time Network • Maryland PTA
Share Our Strength – No Kid Hungry Maryland • St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore

1. Support the Community Eligibility Provision, which creates Hunger-Free Schools

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a federal school meal funding option that allows schools to offer breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students, essentially becoming Hunger-Free Schools. In addition, schools using CEP do not require families to complete annual free and reduced-price school meal applications. CEP was authorized by the federal Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 and more than 102,000 students in Maryland attend one of 238 Hunger-Free Schools.

A recent Johns Hopkins University study found that students attending Maryland schools with CEP were **nearly 3 times less likely to be food insecure**, as compared to students attending a comparison district school – even after adjusting for race/ethnicity and education level of the adult. The study also found **improved attendance** rates in CEP elementary and middle schools, improved grade 10 promotion rates, and higher school lunch participation rates in CEP schools.¹ In addition, CEP also **eliminates unpaid school meal debt** and the ensuing practice of “lunch shaming.”

➔ Therefore, the Partnership strongly supports the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and we encourage legislators to **use state policy to encourage schools to enroll in CEP**.

➔ The Partnership urges the legislature to **include alternative school-level poverty measures that are equivalent to the free and reduced-priced school meal rate** in all programs. Allowing other measures is important for schools that participate in CEP and therefore do not collect meal benefit applications.

- For example, schools should be able to meet eligibility criteria for funding or programming using the Identified Student Percentage (**ISP multiplied by 1.6**), as the USDA has determined that this is equivalent to the free and reduced-price school meal rate. The 1.6 multiplier accounts for the fact that the ISP includes students at a lower level of poverty (< 130% of the federal poverty level) as compared to the free and reduced-price meal rate (< 185%).
- For example, SB1000/HB1300 currently sets funding eligibility for **Community Schools** based on free and reduced-price school meal rate. **In addition to that metric**, CEP schools should be able to qualify for Community School funding using another equivalent measure.

2. Strengthen the Direct Certification System

The Partnership supports a robust **direct certification system** as it is an efficient and effective method to certify low-income students for free school meals without requiring the completion of a free and reduced-price school meal application. This system “directly certifies” students for free school meals through data matching with existing needs-based program databases. Students may be directly certified if they are in foster care or Head Start, are homeless, migrant or living in households that receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19320248.2019.1679318>

(TANF). With a stronger direct certification system, more students will qualify for free meals, poverty counts will be more accurate, and federal reimbursements for school meals will be higher.

- ➔ The Partnership encourages the legislature to require that **all categories** of eligible students be included in the direct certification system. Federal policy currently requires the use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) data, however, all of the additional allowable categories should also be mandated by the state for inclusion in the data matching database. These additional categories include Temporary Aid to Needy Families (**TANF**), students identified as **migrant** or **homeless**, and students in the **foster care** system. Students identified as homeless, for example, can be identified and matched with the Homeless Management Information System (**HMIS**), a database for all federal homelessness funding.
- ➔ The Partnership also strongly supports the inclusion of **Medicaid data** in the direct certification system and encourages the state to apply for this federal option as soon as it becomes available again. Maryland did not elect this when the option was previously available to states and therefore the legislature should provide the support and oversight necessary to participate.
- ➔ The Partnership supports **increased transparency** in the department, with regular progress reports and data updates. While states are required to directly certify at least 95% of children who are members of households receiving SNAP benefits, Maryland has failed to meet the minimum threshold by certifying just 91%.² As a result, thousands of additional children were not directly certified for free school meals, despite being eligible.
- ➔ Until the state applies to use Medicaid data in the direct certification count, school districts should be allowed to use **Medicaid data** as a proxy for poverty for other income-based funding or programs. For example, State compensatory education funding formulas would be more accurate if Medicaid data was available. Note that children (under age 21) are not subject to the Medicaid eligibility requirement to be lawfully present in the US for more than 5 years, therefore, new immigrants that meet income eligibility may qualify for these health benefits.
- ➔ **Access to Medicaid data** would also allow school districts additional flexibility in distributing federal **Title 1** education grants for disadvantaged students. Title 1 funding may be used for teachers, materials, or afterschool programs, for example, and is distributed to school districts based on the Census poverty rate for children aged 5-18. Each district distributes the funding to individual schools based on an assessment of the poverty level in each school – usually the free and reduced-price school meal rate. However, since Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools do not collect free and reduced-price school meal applications, school districts with CEP may choose a different poverty measurement to distribute Title 1 funding. Most school districts with CEP have opted to use the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) and the majority of students captured in the ISP are living in households that receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Due in part to

² Direct certification of SNAP households for the 2014-15 SY, the most recent data available publicly.

recent federal policy changes, immigrant families may be less likely to participate in SNAP, and as a result, ISP may not fully reflect the level of poverty present in a high immigrant school. Fortunately, **school districts may use the following data sources to determine poverty level for distributing their Title 1 funding:** Census poverty data for ages 5-17, free and reduced-price school meal rate, direct certification rate (ISP, with or without a multiplier), TANF, Medicaid, or any combination of these.³ Therefore, the availability of Medicaid data will allow schools additional options to utilize the most accurate poverty measure for their community.

3. Support the Maryland Meals for Achievement Breakfast in the Classroom Program

Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) provides state funding to supplement federal school meal reimbursements so that schools can offer universal free breakfast in the classroom. Research has shown that MMFA improves educational performance and student health and reduces behavioral issues. In addition, every dollar of state MMFA funding leverages an additional \$5.46 in federal reimbursements and MMFA schools have no unpaid school meal debts for breakfast.

- ➔ Schools with poverty rates over 40%, as measured by the free and reduced-price school meal rate, are eligible for MMFA. However, an equivalent poverty measure (ISP x 1.6) should also be permitted to qualify.
- ➔ While 522 schools currently benefit from MMFA, more than 300 are eligible, but unable to participate due to inadequate funding. SB1000/HB1300 should include full funding for this successful intervention, which has supported health and learning in Maryland for more than 20 years.

In conclusion, hungry students are not ready to learn, therefore, SB1000/HB1300 should include support for schools to ensure access to the healthy food our students need.

Respectfully submitted,

The Policy Committee of the Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland

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³ Guidance, The Community Eligibility Provision and Selected Requirements Under Title 1, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended, Rev. March 2015.

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP35-2015av2.pdf>

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