

Testimony in Support of House Bill 786
Department of Human Services, Maryland Department of Health, and Department of
Education—Easing Access to Family Support Programs

Appropriations Committee

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1:30 pm

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Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 786, which would establish that it is Maryland policy to do everything possible to alleviate administrative hurdles for low-income families seeking access to support programs. This would be accomplished in part by requiring the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), and the State Department of Education (MSDE) to take steps to achieve the policy goal and to simplify the application process for family support programs.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA believes that every Maryland child is a whole child—one that needs to feel healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged in order to eventually see success in college, career and life. As such, we are clear that policy and regulatory solutions focused on meeting the needs of the whole child must recognize the unequivocal need to address Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs before we can hope to achieve success along the taxonomy for teaching, learning, and assessment (more commonly known as Bloom's Taxonomy). Meeting the needs of the whole child does not end with the child themselves. We must simultaneously address the needs that exist in the child's family and community. These are critical components of a child's overall sense of health, safety, support, and stability. Our first-hand experience has shown us time and again that our students who attend schools and live in communities with high concentrations of poverty experience immeasurable, life-long adverse impacts. Thus, it is crucial that all



efforts are made to fully address disparities and the lack of access to programs and supports in the areas of physical health, mental health, safe housing, access to technology, parental support, family planning services and education, youth employment, and nutrition. It is with this in mind that we have pledged our unwavering support to the establishment and expansion of community schools.

Community schools are a tremendous first step toward meeting the needs of our students, families, and communities. But more must be done, especially as our state confronts the catastrophic, widespread damage resulting from the global corona virus pandemic. All government agencies charged with providing vital resources and supports to families can and must work in a coordinated and efficient manner to bring timely relief to our fellow Marylanders who are struggling and will likely continue doing so well into the future. The coordination required in this bill moves three critical agencies with direct impact on our students, families and communities—DHS, MDH, and MSDE—into a posture that can best serve the needs we face. Further, by making access to programs, resources, and supports easier for those in need and by creating a process by which efforts across the agencies can be better coordinated will prove to be an overwhelmingly positive systemic paradigm shift, the impacts of which Maryland we see for many years to come.

Given the current and future impacts we expect will result from the COVID-19 global pandemic, we believe very strongly that every step must be taken to prepare our schools, our communities, and our state for what lies ahead; and that these efforts must commence with an appropriate sense of urgency. Coordinating the efforts of three critical state agencies charged with serving and supporting our children, families, and communities is a significant step in the right direction. We applaud this effort and look forward to doing our part to make its enactment and implementation successful. **We urge a favorable report on HB 786.**