

SB 971_Maryland Food Bank_FAV.pdf

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Position: FAV

March 15, 2022

SB 971

Education – Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program – School Lunch

**Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**

Position: Support

Senate Bill 971 provides no cost lunch for all students enrolled at schools which receive a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program. The Maryland Food Bank would also support the inclusion of free breakfast, as well. Additionally, it aims to continue no cost meals for all Maryland students during the 2022-2023 school year in the absence of any federal waiver to provide the same. It also encourages county school systems to apply for the federal Community Eligibility Provision and any other federal meal reimbursement programs.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders are at risk of food insecurity. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, such as families with children.

The Maryland Food Bank knows the importance of providing nutritious and consistent meals to students, particularly those whose families may be considered food insecure. We participate in USDA programming to provide after-school meals through our Supper Club and meals over the summer to students who receive free- and reduced-price meals through our Summer Club, totaling over 530,000 meals between the two programs in FY 21. We also served the equivalent of almost 2.3 million meals to students through our School Pantry program in FY 21, providing a reliable source of healthy foods to families and food insecure communities through partnerships with local schools. In support of these efforts, we found that 87% of Marylanders are motivated by our work to address childhood hunger. SB 971 is a tangible way for the State to tackle this issue, as well.

Reducing barriers to accessing healthy food for children in particular is critical to their developmental and academic success. Providing meals to all students at no cost to families, many of whom were economically unstable prior to the pandemic and for whom the pandemic exacerbated their needs, reduces any perceived stigma around receiving food assistance, increases health outcomes, and supports students' ability to concentrate and learn in the classroom. The Maryland Food Bank feels strongly that no child should have uncertainty around where their next meal will come from. With 3 out of 4 Marylanders recognizing that hunger exists in their communities and 74% wanting the State to invest more dollars to address hunger, there is clear support and an urgent need to pass a bill like SB 971 to provide all children with access to healthy meals on a regular and predictable basis.

The Maryland Food Bank appreciates your consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 971.

Share Our Strength - Testimony in Support - SB 97

Uploaded by: Ayesha Holmes

Position: FAV



MARYLAND

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 971

Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

Health, Education and Environmental Affairs Committee

March 15, 2022

No Kid Hungry Maryland is pleased to support SB 971 which would establish a mechanism to expand access to free school meals for Maryland K-12 students, while supporting school systems, students, and their families as they recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a campaign of national anti-hunger organization Share Our Strength, No Kid Hungry Maryland works with partners – lawmakers, educators, business leaders and nonprofits – to identify and eliminate the barriers that may prevent children and families from accessing healthy and nutritious meals. Passage of SB 971 represents an important step toward achieving our goal of providing children with healthy and nourishing meals.

1 in 6 children in Maryland were estimated to have faced hunger last year, undoing more than a decade of progress in ending childhood hunger. The hunger crisis is hitting communities of color the hardest, with Black and Latino families with children reporting food insecurity twice as often as white households. While the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken steps to support access to meals during the pandemic, including allowing schools to serve meals at no charge to all students, these measures are currently set to expire on June 30, 2022. This will mean the end of a critical nutritional resource for children and families as they continue to experience economic hardship.

Schools and essential nutrition service workers have proven themselves to be trusted community lifelines for students and families. SB 971 expands access to school meals by requiring schools receiving a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to provide school lunch at no cost for all of their students. This legislation builds off of the important investments made in the 2019 Blueprint Bill for Maryland's Future (Blueprint Bill) by supporting equity in the classroom and making sure every child has the nutrition they need to excel.

Aside from the immediate need to reduce child hunger, a body of evidence shows that adequate nutrition benefits child development, behavior, the ability to learn, and the creation of lifelong healthy habits. SB 971 will ensure that Maryland's K-12 students have the nutrition they need to learn and thrive.

SB 971 would improve access to nutritious meals, improve the school academic environment, and help address child hunger, particularly among low-income families. Therefore, we are pleased to support SB 971 and urge committee members to vote “yes” when this bill is before them. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact No Kid Hungry Maryland at aholmes@strength.org.

Ayesha Holmes
Director
No Kid Hungry Maryland

SB 971 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: CHELSI LEWIS

Position: FAV

My name is Chelsi Lewis, and I am a member of the Client Leadership Council of the Capital Area Food Bank. My children and I have been living in Montgomery County, MD for 15 months now. I am a single parent of 3 children (my twins are Juniors in high school and my youngest is in his first year of middle school). I am here to express how important healthy meals in schools are to not only me and my family but to all families. I have battled with food insecurities for a very long time, and that was primarily due to me not earning a comfortable salary at the jobs I have had. I realized my barrier was not having a college degree, because we all know, having a college degree equates to higher salaries in the job market. That is why I am in college full time at Bowie State University, in Bowie, MD at this very moment, so that I can overcome the financial barriers that I have been faced with for years. I have had to depend on school breakfasts and lunches to feed my children and it is important for all children to receive healthy, tasty meals while attending school. I believe school meal programs are critical because they provide children with the nutrition they need to be able to thrive in school and out of school. A child that does not eat breakfast or lunch is unable to focus while in school. Who can focus on anything when they are hungry? Offering school meals to all students at no cost is a huge step toward ending childhood hunger. The passing of SB 971 matters wholeheartedly to me and it will give me the security of knowing my children are going to have healthy breakfasts and lunches 5 days a week.

I strongly encourage everyone to support SB 971 and I am confident that if this bill is passed, in the years to come, you will see the difference this bill can and will make on our children.

Again, my name is Chelsi Lewis and thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story.

MAND Testimony - SUPPORT - SB971 - Education - Con

Uploaded by: Daniel Shattuck

Position: FAV

MARYLAND ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS



Date: March 15, 2022

Bill: Senate Bill 971 - Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

Committee: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
The Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky, Chair

Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
The Honorable Senator Guy Guzzone, Chair

Position: **Support**

The Maryland Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics represents about 1200 Registered and Licensed Dietitians/Nutritionists in the state. Licensed Registered Dietitian/Nutritionists work in many different types of facilities from hospitals to schools, supermarkets to long term care facilities. Our mission is to educate the citizens of Maryland in the health implications of good nutrition with evidenced based information.

Senate Bill 971 states that eligible schools, that receive a per-pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program, provide free school lunches to each student who attends eligible schools. This bill prohibits a county board of education from charging students for school lunch. It also requires specific funding in the state budget to provide students with free school lunches.

Food insecurity disrupts food intake or eating patterns due to a lack of money or resources. Food insecurity among children has been associated with adverse health, social, and academic outcomes. Consequently, in 2015, 16.6% of households with children were classified as food insecure (adults, children, or both) in 7.8 percent of all families with children (1). The incidence of food insecurity increased during the Covid pandemic by 18%. Child nutrition programs improve diet quality, and academic performance for low-income and food-insecure households.

USDA school meal programs and other child nutrition programs improve food security. They do so by augmenting overall household resources and providing children with a regular source of nutritious meals. Understanding the role that school meal programs play in the dietary adequacy of children at risk for food insecurity helps assess program effectiveness. (2)

The Maryland Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recognizes that many of the populations we serve are at risk for food insecurity. The Academy's policy recommendations for healthy food systems and access includes Food Security.

Increasing access to affordable, healthy foods and safe water in communities, places of work, and schools, helps support efforts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to link healthy food to positive health outcomes (3)

For these reasons, we support the goals and aims of Senate Bill 971 and ask for a FAVORABLE report.

Dr. Glenda L. Lindsey, Dr. PH, MS, RDN, LDN
Public Policy Coordinator

Susan O'Malley, MS, RDN, LDN
MAND State Policy Representative

Teresa Turner MS, RDN, LDN
MAND President

References:

1. Katherine Ralston, Katie Treen, Alisha Coleman-Jensen, and Joanne Guthrie; Children's Food Security and USDA Child Nutrition Programs United States Department of Agriculture Summary https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84003/eib-174_summary.pdf, Retrieved February 15, 2022
2. Wolfson JA, Leung CW. Food insecurity and COVID-19: disparities in early effects for U.S. adults. *Nutrients*. 2020;12(6):1648. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12061648> Crossref, Google Scholar
3. <https://files.constantcontact.com/9806343e601/e5179f65-55a9-4410-9435-68ae82770260.pdf>

SB971_MOST_SUPPORT.pdf

Uploaded by: Ellie Mitchell

Position: FAV



SB 971 - Favorable
Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch
March 15, 2022 – Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

The Maryland Out of School Time Network founded The Maryland Coalition for Community Schools (MD4CS) in 2016 to advocate for student and family success by leading the charge to expand the Community School Model in Maryland. MD4CS enthusiastically supports SB 971 which will require community schools that receive per-pupil grant funding from the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to provide school meals to all children at no cost to them or their families.

SB 971 complements the existing Blueprint Bill funding mechanisms. The Concentration of Poverty Grant Program already identifies the state's most underserved and underfunded schools. Tying funding for meals to community schools is an effective and efficient way to ensure that our state's most needy students and families receive support.

This bill also supports the overall community school strategy - which has been identified by both the federal and state government as an effective tool to reduce poverty and improve student outcomes. Community schools employ a community school coordinator to identify school assets and gaps in support, form strong partnerships with surrounding organizations, and integrate supports and services into the school. Comprehensively addressing food access for students and families means Blueprint funding can focus on targeted academic and social supports.

Continuing to fund healthy school meals for all across the state will have a major impact on our students, families, and school systems. MD4CS represents community school stakeholders and supporters from across the state of Maryland.

Community school coordinators and practitioners have been first responders to students, families, and the school system since the pandemic began. They have played a critical role in supplying and distributing food and academic supplies over the past two years. Anyone in the community school strategy will tell you - Hungry students cannot be engaged and ready to learn. Providing state funding for school meals helps students make the most out of school time and alleviates a lot of stress and cost for families.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that every child in Maryland receives the healthy food they need to stay hunger-free and ready to learn; therefore we urge a favorable report for SB 971

SB0971_FAV_Montgomery County Food Council.pdf

Uploaded by: Heather Bruskin

Position: FAV



March 14, 2022

2022 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
SB 0971: Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant
Program - School Lunch

BILL: SB0971: Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
POSITION: Testimony of Support of Senate Bill 0971
BILL ANALYSIS: This bill will grant free school lunch to students who attend schools eligible for the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program. County boards of education will be prohibited from charging students for school lunches at eligible schools. Additional funding will be set aside to provide free school meals to students who do not attend eligible schools.

Dear Chair Pinsky and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

The Montgomery County Food Council strongly urges you to support SB 971 Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch, which will provide free school lunches to students who attend schools eligible for the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program. This bill will be instrumental in reducing food insecurity for thousands of students and avoid the potential social marginalization of students in need of food assistance. The Food Council views this bill as an important step toward school readiness and success for all students, by reducing cost and social barriers that prevent some children from accessing proper nutrition needed during the school day.

The Food Council highly prioritizes building a more equitable food system in Maryland. This bill will help alleviate stark racial disparities in food access in our state by guaranteeing students receive a nutritious lunch in areas with high concentrations of poverty. As we look to create a more resilient food system following historically high food insecurity rates during the Covid-19 pandemic, which many residents still and will continue to experience, it is imperative we ensure students can access a nutritious school lunch during the day. By allocating funding specifically toward Community Schools, where student populations experience higher rates of food insecurity, we can make a strategic and significant impact on child hunger in our state.



Many students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch also feel stigmatized and vulnerable compared to other students who don't receive the benefit, leading many not to use it at all to avoid drawing attention to their need.¹ Making school meals free at eligible schools will eliminate this social barrier many students feel when in need of food assistance.

The science is clear-- school meals are crucial for children's cognitive development and overall health and are essential to provide the energy to remain engaged throughout the school day.² It is time to remove barriers for Maryland students most in need to make sure their potential is not limited by hunger. That is why the Food Council is in strong support of **SB0071** and urges a favorable report **FOR** this bill.

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources.

For more information, please contact: Heather Bruskin, MCFC Executive Director at the email and phone number below.

¹ Ford Foundation, 2017 "Fighting the stigma of free lunch: Why universal free school lunch is good for students, schools, and families"

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021 "Childhood Nutrition Facts"



WDC Testimony SB0971-2022_FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: JoAnne Koravos

Position: FAV



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

Senate Bill SB0971
Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs & Budget and Taxation - March. 15, 2022
SUPPORT

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2022 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic Clubs in our County with hundreds of politically active women and men, including many elected officials.

WDC strongly supports SB0971, which aims to expand access to school meals by requiring schools receiving a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to provide school lunch at no cost for all of their students. Additionally, this bill will support school systems, students, and their families as they recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by covering the cost of breakfast and lunch for all Maryland students during the 2022-2023 school year.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought increased attention to the unacceptably high number of Maryland families that struggle with food insecurity, which has only continued to grow over the past two years. As hundreds of thousands of Maryland children and families begin the long process of recovery from the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, there has never been a more important time to make significant investments in the school meal programs.

Extensive research has linked participation in school meals to several benefits:

- improved academic achievement, standardized test scores, and cognitive function ¹;
- improved attendance, which is positively linked to academic achievement ²;
- reduced food insecurity, which is linked to poor academic outcomes³;
- improved nutrition, such as increased consumption of fruit, vegetables, and milk⁴;

¹ Frisvold, D. E. (2015). Nutrition and cognitive achievement: an evaluation of the School Breakfast Program. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272714002497>.

² Basch, C. E. (2011). Breakfast and the achievement gap among urban minority youth. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21923876/>.

³ Huang, J., & Barnidge, E. (2016). Low-income children's participation in the National School Lunch Program and household food insufficiency. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26722983/>.

⁴ Clark, M. A., & Fox, M. K. (2009). Nutritional quality of the diets of U.S. public school children and the role of the school meal programs. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19166672/>.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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- improved overall health and long-term health outcomes, as well as reduction in obesity rates, anxiety, and depression⁵.

However, as vital as school meals are to ensuring students have access to healthy, nutritious meals, too many children in need are left out due to the current program structure. To qualify for free school meals, a student's family must be living at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, which translates to annual income of less than \$35,000 for a family of four for the 2021–2022 school year⁶. Similarly, a family of four must have an annual income of around \$49,000 or less to qualify for reduced-price meals. Because the eligibility threshold for these programs is so low, many Maryland families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs do not qualify. During the past two years, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided waivers to schools across the country, allowing them to serve free school meals to all students. As Maryland begins to recover from the economic, social, and health impacts of the pandemic, this ability to serve all students nutritious meals, regardless of income needs to be extended.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report for SB0971.

Respectfully,

Leslie Milano
President

⁵ Gundersen, C., Kreider, B., & Pepper, J. (2012). The impact of the National School Lunch Program on child health: a nonparametric bounds analysis. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0304407611001205>.

⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. (2021). Child Nutrition Programs: Income Eligibility Guidelines. Available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-03-04/pdf/2021-04452.pdf>.

SB 971.Free Meals at Community Schools - REVISED.p

Uploaded by: John Woolums

Position: FAV

BILL: Senate Bill 971
TITLE: Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch
DATE: March 15, 2022
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Budget and Taxation
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports Senate Bill 971, which would provide sufficient state funding to enable school systems to provide the bill's mandated free school meals to all students attending community schools beginning in the 2023-2024 school year.

MABE is committed to and strongly supports both the continued expansion of student access to nutritious school meals, and to the expansion of the community schools program launched in advance of and through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Act. MABE certainly recognizes the importance of developing healthy school environments, which includes providing high quality health and physical education programs as well as meeting the nutritional needs of students through school breakfasts, lunches, afterschool meals, and vending machine policies. Local boards support this legislation because it would provide additional state funding to ensure a universally free school meal program for more students. These programs and services are, of course, critically important to be provided in community schools in communities experiencing concentrated poverty.

Local boards of education are joining advocates for ending childhood hunger and promoting the health and learning of students in strong support for this legislation. The funding provided by this legislation is needed to address the problem that many low-income students are not able to participate in the school meal programs because their household income is too high to qualify for free meals, yet too low to afford the reduced-price school meal co-pays. As a result, reduced-price eligible students are more likely to incur go without the regular meals they need; and significantly less likely to eat school meals compared to students that qualify for free school meals.

The federal child nutrition law, entitled the "The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act," has mandated major reforms in school meal programs to improve the nutritional value of the meals served to Maryland students each day. In addition to federal reforms, Maryland has enacted several meaningful programs to enhance student access to breakfasts, lunches, and after school options, and partnerships to help ensure daily access to healthy food for all students.

MABE is very concerned that the pending federal spending package would not extend school meal eligibility waivers through the coming school year, jeopardizing the availability of affordable school meals to millions of American students unless sufficient state and local aid is provided.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 971.

MD Hunger Solutions - SB 971 - Concentration of Po

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Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 971

Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

*Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Senate Budget & Taxation Committee*

March 15, 2022

Maryland Hunger Solutions strongly supports SB 971, which aims to require schools receiving a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to provide school meals to all children at no cost to them or their families using a combination of state and federal funding. This bill will also provide state funding to continue providing school meals at no cost to all students in Maryland during the 2022-2023 school year as they have been for the past two years under federal pandemic-related waivers.

As a statewide, non-partisan, nonprofit organization working to end hunger, improve nutrition, and promote the well-being of Marylanders in need, Maryland Hunger Solutions works to overcome existing barriers in state and federal nutrition assistance programs and create self-sustaining connections between Maryland residents and nutritious foods.

Among these programs, the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program play the most critical roles in directly addressing childhood food insecurity. [Multiple studies have linked participation in school meals to an incredible number of beneficial outcomes for students](#) including reduced food insecurity, decreased rates of obesity, improved overall nutrition and wellness, enhanced child development and school readiness, and improved academic achievement, attendance, and classroom behavior.

Over the past two years, even while classes met virtually and schools struggled to maintain a consistent learning model and schedule, the school meal programs have continued to serve as a critical resource to keep children fed during short- and long-term closures, alleviate child hunger, and advance racial equity and child well-being. This has been thanks to federal child nutrition waivers put in place by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which not only helped school and community meal sponsors to adequately respond to the fallout from COVID- 19, but also removed the cost to children and their families, allowing all students across Maryland and nationwide to access healthy school meals at no cost over the course of the past two school years. It's important to note that as our food system has struggled with supply chain challenges, school food and nutrition issues have not been exempted. But food and nutrition services have worked heroically to provide school meals to students across our state and our most impoverished students have benefited the most.

Unfortunately, these federal waivers are set to end in June 2022. And despite efforts to advocate for an extension of these waivers, Congress failed to include them in the recent omnibus appropriations package, making SB 971 more critical than ever to ensure Maryland has a safety net in place that will continue covering the cost of school meals through the next school year.



Maryland families and communities continue to need support, particularly Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous families who disproportionately lack reliable access to healthy meals. Additionally, school nutrition departments are still struggling to operate due to supply chain issues, staffing shortages, frequent school closures and the continued safety threat of new variants and COVID exposures. By continuing to fund healthy school meals for all across Maryland through the 2022-2023 school year, SB 971 will be making a smart and undeniably impactful investment in supporting school systems and Maryland families during this extended pandemic recovery process.

In addition to this short-term investment, SB 971 will also be making an effective change in the current school meal system, which perfectly complements and bolsters the educational resources allocated to community schools through the per pupil grant created by the 2019 Blueprint Bill for Maryland's Future (Blueprint Bill).

Despite the proven health and educational benefits of the school meal programs, the current tiered payment system prevents too many children from accessing healthy meals during the school day. While the free and reduced-price meal program exists to ensure low-income children receive the nutritional support they need, many families who struggle to meet their most basic needs do not apply or even qualify for this program. For example, a family of four living on just \$50,000 per year is ineligible for any support from this program. Additionally, the stigma that is inherent to a tiered payment system often prevents students and families who are eligible from taking advantage of the program, often resulting in burdensome school meal debt that negatively impacts school systems, low-income families, and their children.

SB 971 aims to permanently remove these barriers in high poverty community schools that are receiving a per pupil grant. The community school model being used in these schools already seeks to recognize and support the wellbeing of the whole child through wrap-around services such as school-based health centers, behavioral and mental health services, workforce development training, and other student enrichment experiences. Adding state funding dedicated to providing all children in these schools, regardless of income, with access to healthy meals will help ensure that every child is ready to learn and thrive and can take full advantage of the educational investments already made by the Blueprint Bill.

While we look forward to a day when every Maryland child receives the healthy meals they need to stay hunger free and ready to learn, SB 971 takes an important step in this direction by continuing school meal service at no cost through the 2022-2023 school year, and in high-poverty community schools permanently.

As such, we respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 971. Thank you for your consideration.

SB 971 Education - Concentration of Poverty School

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Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 971

Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

*Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee*

March 15, 2022

We, the undersigned Maryland organizations and associations, write in support of SB 971, which aims to require schools receiving a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to provide school meals to all children at no cost to them or their families. This bill will also provide state funding to continue providing school meals at no cost to all students in Maryland during the 2022-2023 school year in the event that federal pandemic-related waivers are not extended.

Studies have long shown that school meals reduce childhood hunger, decrease childhood overweight and obesity, improve child nutrition and wellness, enhance child development and school readiness, and support learning, attendance, and behavior. More recent studies reaffirm that access to nutritious meals in school increases the long-term health and educational outcomes for children by helping to establish healthy eating habits from an early age.

Despite these proven benefits, the current system leaves too many children behind. While school meals remain one of the federal government's most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children, many families who struggle to meet their most basic needs do not qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. For example, a family of four living on just \$50,000 per year is ineligible for this program. Additionally, the stigma that is inherent to a tiered payment system often prevents students and families who are eligible from taking advantage of the program.

This bill aims to address these barriers in community schools receiving a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program created by the 2019 Blueprint Bill for Maryland's Future (Blueprint Bill). This funding is dedicated to helping schools with high concentrations of poverty to provide wrap-around services such as school-based health centers, behavioral and mental health services, workforce development training, and other student enrichment experiences. Adding state funding to provide school meals in these schools at no cost to students is the perfect complement to the educational investments already made by the Blueprint Bill, supporting both schools and communities by eliminating school meal debt and the burden that it places on school systems, families, and children.

Additionally, SB 971 allocates some of Maryland's current budget surplus to providing school meals at no charge to any student across the state for one school year in the event that federal pandemic-related waivers are not extended. Currently, schools across the country are serving school meals at no cost because of federal child nutrition waivers that have been in place since early 2020. However, these waivers are currently set to end in June, 2022, and while Maryland schools have made strides toward returning to in-person learning, operations are still far from normal. Not only are communities and families still struggling with the economic impacts of the pandemic, but school systems and nutrition departments are also struggling with supply chain disruptions, threat of outbreaks and school closures, workforce challenges, and rising prices. Continuing to fund healthy school meals for all across Maryland

through the 2022-2023 school year will be undeniably impactful in supporting school systems and Maryland families during this extended pandemic recovery process.

We represent local and state organizations that see firsthand the impact of poverty and food insecurity in our state. We also know how life changing providing school meals at no cost could be for students, their families, schools, and communities.

Thank you for your leadership and we look forward to working with you to ensure that every child in this country receives the healthy food they need to stay hunger free and ready to learn.

Thank you for your consideration.

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Food Research & Action Center

NAACP Maryland State Conference

Maryland Coalition for Community Schools

SEIU Local 500

American Heart Association

Capital Area Food Bank

Healthy School Food Maryland

Anne Arundel County Food Bank

Crossroads Community Food Network

Manna Food Center

SB971_MD Center on Economic Policy_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kali Schumitz

Position: FAV



Expanding Access to No-Cost School Meals Will Boost Health and Learning For Maryland Students

Position Statement Supporting Senate Bill 971

Given before the Senate Environment, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

In times of uncertainty and increase economic anxiety in Maryland households reducing the financial strain on low-income families would be a significant relief. Requiring the cost of providing school lunch to be covered by federal reimbursement and state funding would improve health and education for Maryland children. **For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports SB 971.**

School meal programs are a critical resource that provide children with the nutrition they need to thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in both the short and long term. However, the labeling of children and families who benefit from such programs creates social barriers. Maryland can address this by offering school breakfast and lunch to all students, ensuring every child is able to get a healthy meal at school while also eliminating the stigma of these critical programs.

Additionally, SB 971 will help to address the growing food insecurity impacting families as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Last month, more than 9% of adults in households with children in Maryland reported that they didn't always have enough food in the past week, highlighting the ongoing need for robust food assistance in the state.¹ Covering the cost of breakfast and lunch for all Maryland students during the 2022-2023 school year will help to ensure that fewer of our students face fewer struggles in or out of the classroom.

Extensive research has linked participation in school meals to a number of benefits:

- Improved academic achievement, standardized test scores, and cognitive function;
- Improved attendance, which is positively linked to academic achievement;
- Reduced food insecurity, which is linked to poor academic outcomes;
- Improved nutrition, such as increased consumption of fruit, vegetables, and milk;
- Improved overall health and long-term health outcomes, as well as reduction in obesity rates, anxiety, and depression.

Providing school meals at no cost to all students and families in the state for an additional school year is a smart and effective investment in Maryland communities. **For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee to make a favorable report on SB 971.**

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 971

Bill summary

SB 971 requires schools that receive a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to provide free school lunch to each student. It also requires funding to be provided in the state budget to provide students with free school lunch for all students for the 2022-2023 school year.

Background

During the past two years, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided waivers to schools across the country, allowing them to serve free school meals to all students. As Maryland begins to recover from the economic, social, and health impacts of the pandemic, this ability to serve all students nutritious meals, regardless of income needs to be extended.

Too many children in need are left out due to the current school meals program structure. To qualify for free school meals, a student's family must be living at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, which translates to annual income of less than \$35,000 for a family of four for the 2021–2022 school year. Similarly, a family of four must have an annual income of around \$49,000 or less to qualify for reduced-price meals. Because the eligibility threshold for these programs are so low, many Maryland families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs do not qualify.

Equity Implications

Policies in the past have led to a system of unequal opportunities for marginalized groups within Maryland. Although the most obviously racially discriminatory policies have long been overturned or mitigated, the impact of these policies continue to persist in both society and public policy and have led to significant racial and health disparities. Families with children, Marylanders of color, and people with disabilities are all more likely to qualify for and need food assistance programs because of these barriers. Children of color experience much higher rates of economic insecurity and poverty and are more likely to benefit from expanded access to school meals.

Impact

Senate Bill 971 would likely **improve racial and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ Week 42 Household Pulse Survey: January 26 – February 7, 2022, U.S. Census Bureau.
<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2022/demo/hhp/hhp42.html>

Support AHA SB 971 Healthy School Meals.pdf

Uploaded by: Laura Hale

Position: FAV



March 14, 2022

Testimony of Laura Hale

American Heart Association

Support of SB 971- Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. The American Heart Association extends its support for Senate Bill 971 - Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association.

Access to nutritious healthy food is essential for long term heart health. Unfortunately, too many Maryland students do not have money for school breakfast and lunch. This legislation begins important to bridge the gap, making sure Maryland students get both a healthy breakfast and lunch. When kids have healthy meals they are better able to grow and learn. School meals are critical for students experiencing food and nutrition insecurity at home as they provide the healthy calories kids need to learn and grow¹.

Programs that provide healthy school meals for all help reduce students' experiences with food and nutrition insecurity². This legislation also takes important steps to include the Community Eligibility Provision. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) not only allows for more students eat a healthy school meal, it also reduces the paperwork and bureaucracy for school food service workers. This provides school nutrition professionals more time to do what they do best – to prepare healthy, appealing meals for students³.

The steps taken during the COVID-19 pandemic to extend school lunch and breakfast programs in Maryland have been essential for many families and we urge the state to continue to provide this key investment in our children.

The American Heart Association urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 971 to support the health our children.

¹ Forrestal S, Potamites E, Guthrie J, Paxton N. Associations among food security, school meal participation, and students' diet quality in the first school nutrition and meal cost study. *Nutrients*. 2021; 13: 307. doi: 10.3390/nu13020307

² Cohen JF, Hect AA, McLoughlin GM, Turner L, Schwartz MB. Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: a systematic review. *Nutrients*. 2021; 13:911. doi: 10.3390/nu13030911.

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. Community Eligibility Provision Evaluation. February 2014. Available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/CEPEvaluation.pdf>. Hecht AA, Neff RA, Kelley TL, Pollack Porter KM. Universal free school meals through the Community Eligibility Provision: Maryland food service provider perspectives. *JAFSCD*. 2021; 10: 529-550. doi: 10.5304/jafscd.2021.102.033

Montgomery County Testimony - Support for SB 971.d

Uploaded by: Maria Yu

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 971

Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

House Ways and Means Committee

March 3, 2022

[Maria Yu/Rockville/Healthy School Food MD) (Richard Montgomery High School)]

My name is Maria Yu and I am a freshman at Richard Montgomery High School. I am submitting testimony in favor of something that will be an effective investment in all Maryland communities: the state funded universal free meals that SB 971 calls for.

Prior to the pandemic, too many children in public schools were left out of these benefits of access to nutritious food due to the current program structure. Because the eligibility threshold for these programs are so low, many families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs do not qualify.

For me, as a student of one of Maryland's public schools, I am a witness to how free lunches have benefitted students. Many of our families are continuing to face economic and financial challenges, as unemployment rates have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Evidently, universally free lunch meals have lifted a huge financial burden for many families across the state. However, it has also lifted an emotional and mental burden. Although the Free and Reduced Meals program is common in districts across our state, a stigma surrounding it is also consistent. Many students are terrified of being discovered that their family needs financial aid. Cases of extreme bullying and harassment are not new concepts that have arosedue to one's socioeconomic status. To clarify, I am not saying that this is a bad program, however, I am urging you to consider the benefits that will come with the passing of this bill as it will also lessen the anxiety that comes with the current program in place.

Now that Congress has not extended the waivers in the recent omnibus bill, Maryland must act to ensure that all Maryland students continue having access to healthy school meals in this universal manner.

A number of states have taken significant steps to ensure the access provided during the pandemic is something that families can count on, and Maryland should do the same. When it is common knowledge of how detrimental it can be to students academically and health-wise when they skip their meals, is it fair to say that those students are receiving an equitable education?

SB971_FAV_MD Food System Resiliency Council.pdf

Uploaded by: Michael J Wilson

Position: FAV

March 15, 2022

2022 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
SB971: Public Schools - Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste

BILL: Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

POSITION: Testimony of Support of House Bill 0971

BILL ANALYSIS: Require all schools receiving a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to make school lunch available to all students at no charge to the student or their family. Require the cost of providing school lunch to be covered by federal reimbursement and state funding. Encourage eligible schools to maximize federal dollars by participating in the Community Eligibility Provision. Mandate state funding to be available to cover the cost of school meals for all students in Maryland through SY 2022- 2023 in the event current federal waivers are not extended past this school year.

My name is Heather Bruskin, and I have the privilege to serve as the Co-Chair of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council. I submit testimony today on behalf of the members of the Council itself – not the government or the Governor’s office- in SUPPORT of SB971 to provide healthy school meals to all Maryland students.

The Food System Resiliency Council was established by the Maryland General Assembly in the 2021 legislative session to bring together 33 appointed council members from across the state, all with different points of entry and expertise to work toward a more resilient food system and address the food insecurity crisis due to COVID-19.

One of the changes in our food system that happened during the time of the pandemic was federal support for and state use of waivers to provide healthy school meals to all students across the nation. As the public health emergency has begun evolve, several states have implemented and funded universal meal programs at the state level. While this legislation does not provide for a permanent universal school meal program for Maryland, it does provide a one-year bridge from the current policy by utilizing a combination of state and federal provisions to enact healthy school meals for Maryland for the next school year. It then continues to provide funding to cover the cost of school lunch permanently for all students attending high poverty community schools that receive a per pupil grant as outlined in the 2019 Blueprint for Maryland’s Future.

As Co-Chair of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council, and behalf of the membership of the Council, we enthusiastically encourage a favorable report for this legislation and the opportunity it provides to build a more just, equitable, and resilient food system.

Thank you.

Heather Bruskin, Co-Chair, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

MD Catholic Conference_FAV_SB0971.pdf

Uploaded by: MJ Kraska

Position: FAV



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 15, 2022

SB 971

Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

**Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Senate Budget & Taxation Committee**

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference (“Conference”) represents the public policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch)dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.

Senate Bill 971 requires an eligible school that receives a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to provide free school lunch to each student at the eligible school under certain circumstances; prohibiting a county board of education from charging students for school lunch at an eligible school; and requiring certain funding to be provided in the State budget to provide certain students with free school lunch.

The Church is a strong and steady voice for programs that help alleviate poverty and its effects, stating that “[o]ur commitment to the dignity of every person requires a special concern for those who are poor and vulnerable, whose needs are greatest, and whose lives and dignity are often threatened by hunger, poverty, and suffering.” (*For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, 2003)

The Conference historically and routinely supports legislation aimed at addressing food insecurity and other such poverty ailments among vulnerable and often marginalized populations in the state. Students who face food insecurity and hunger often exist in the shadows, especially when support systems are either inadequate to address the need or not in place at all. Senate Bill 971 is a crucial first step in addressing this serious and overlooked concern, especially for students who may be additionally vulnerable due to other factors such as citizenship status, familial instability, or other economic barriers, including homelessness.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 971.

SB971_MSEA_Zwerling_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Samantha Zwerling

Position: FAV

**Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 971
Education – Concentration of Poverty Grant Program – School Lunch**

**Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
March 15, 2022**

**Samantha Zwerling
Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 971, which requires all schools receiving a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to make school meals available to all students at no charge to the student or their family. Achieving, as outlined in this bill, universal meal programs is one of MSEA's legislative priorities in the 2022 Legislative Session.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators 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).

“Hungry children cannot be expected to fully engage in their learning if they are distracted by their empty bellies. By ensuring that all students have access to healthy school meals, we are making a significant investment in our state's most precious resource. Providing every child in our state with the nutritious meal their growing bodies need to thrive not only helps them be better prepared to learn, it's also the right and humane thing to do.”

- Cheryl Bost, President, Maryland State Education Association

Educators know all too well that, for far too many of our students, the only source of a nutritious meal they might have access to in a day is at their school. Few things are more gut wrenching to educators than seeing their students suffer, particularly for the want of the sufficient amount of food their growing bodies need to survive and thrive. Hungry children experience real and lasting health impacts that can put their physical, mental and cognitive development at risk as well as their social-emotional functioning. These impacts lead to deleterious effects such as poorer academic and behavioral outcomes for the children in our schools. Hungry children cannot be expected to fully engage in their learning if their attention is rapt by the rumbling and discomfort in their empty bellies.

This bill pairs nicely with the work the General Assembly has done through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and builds on the last decade of meal expansion bills for students. The General Assembly and education advocates have worked in tandem



to bring greater focus to community schools and to provide targeted resources to students living in concentrated poverty. 45% of Maryland students now live in poverty and unfortunately that number has grown in the last debate. As we work to stand-up these community schools around the state with important wrap around services, universal meals is another piece of that puzzle. Universal meals as outlined here reduce administrative burden, reduce meal shaming amongst students, and ensure that students are ready to learn with full bellies.

Senate Bill 971 requires all eligible schools to apply to the United State Department of Agriculture's Community Eligibility Provision program, ensuring that schools are taking advantage of as much federal funding as possible. While this bill would also require a mandated appropriation for any funding not covered by the federal government, that's a worthy investment. MSEA continues to look for ways to work with the General Assembly, the Maryland State Department of Education, and Maryland's federal delegation on ways to better count students in poverty than the Free and Reduced Price Meals forms, and ensure that there is no question on penalties for not collecting those forms.

The State must do whatever practicable to make feeding children easier and this bill is a meaningful effort toward that goal.

MSEA urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 971.

MEC Testimony-SB971.pdf

Uploaded by: Shanetta Martin

Position: FAV



Maryland Education Coalition



Shanetta Martin & Sue Fothergill – Co-chairs

Web site - www.marylandeducationcoalition.org Email – md.ed.coaliton@gmail.com

Date: March 15, 2022
BILL: [SB971](#) / [HB857](#)
POSITION: Support

TITLE: Education – Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program – School Lunch
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

SB971 - Education – Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program – School Lunch - establishes a free school lunch program for students in schools that have been identified for participation in the State’s Concentration of Poverty Grant Program. The bill mandates the Governor to allocate in their budget beginning in fiscal year 2024 funding to provide school lunch at no charge for students who attend a community school but are not eligible for free or reduced meals. The Concentration of Poverty Grant Program is a state grant program for schools at 55% concentration of poverty or greater. The program provides state resources to hire a Community School Coordinator, expand school based health services, and implement the Community Schools Strategy. This bill would ensure that all children in a Community School have access to subsidized free lunch. Schools would only be eligible for this expanded feeding program if the school or the LEA also applies for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Eligibility Provision and any other Federal programs that provide school lunch reimbursement.

According to the [Maryland food bank](#) 1 in 3 Marylanders face food insecurity. Families are often faced with the decision of balancing tight budgets, including choosing between purchasing enough food for three full meals a day, paying rent, providing for their transportation needs, or covering other expenses such as electricity, water, and healthcare bills. When choosing between rent and electricity versus food, housing can take precedence. Meaning that children go hungry or eat less calories a day than they need to grow healthy. Further exacerbating this issue are food deserts otherwise known as Limited Supermarket Access (LSA) areas. A food access [market analysis](#) by the Reinvestment Fund, found that 602,845 or 9.6% of Marylanders live in LSA areas, of whom 48% live in low-income census block groups. When ranked by the percentage of the population that is both low income and living in an LSA area, Maryland ranked tenth in the nation. At the time of the analysis Maryland had 38 LSA areas consisting of 498 block groups across 13 counties.

Ensuring that Maryland school children do not go hungry is not just a moral issue, it is also an academic issue. The Research paper, [Estimating Impacts of a Breakfast in the Classroom Program on School Outcomes](#), found that schools that instituted school breakfast programs showed improved rates of student attendance compared to schools that did not. Regular student attendance is a key factor in student success in school.

If we are to build a World Class education system, we must ensure that no Maryland school child goes hungry. Expanding Maryland’s Concentration of Poverty Grant program to be inclusive of ensuring every child has access to a free lunch is a commonsense approach to furthering the impact of this strategic investment.

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) is the oldest, largest, most experienced, and diverse group of public education stakeholders in Maryland. We are an independent, non-partisan voice for Maryland’s K-12 students. MEC’s goal is to ensure adequate, equitable funding, policies and accountability for the estimated 900,000 public school students in Maryland and is committed to advocating for state education policies that deliver on the constitutional right and civil right for all students to access a high-quality, competitive education.

For these and other reasons, we urge a favorable report for HB857.

American Civil Liberties Union of MD, Arts Education in Maryland Schools, Arts Every Day, Attendance Works, CASA, Children’s Behavioral Health Coalition, Decoding Dyslexia of MD, Disability Rights Maryland, League of Women Voters of MD, Let Them See Clearly, Right to Read Maryland, Maryland Coalition for Community Schools, Maryland Coalition for Gifted & Talented Ed, Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition, Maryland Out of School Time Network, Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, MSC-NAACP, Maryland School Psychologists’ Association, Parent Advocacy Consortium, Public Justice Center, School Social Workers of MD, Strong Schools Maryland, Kalman Hettleman, David Hornbeck, Shanetta Martin, Sharon Rubinstein, Rick Tyler, Jr.

S.Johnson MGA Testimony SB0971.pdf

Uploaded by: Shaquintay Johnson

Position: FAV

Senator Young
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Budget and Taxation
Maryland General Assembly - 2022 Session

RE: SB0971- HB0857

Greetings,

My name is Shaquintay Johnson. I am testifying in favor of providing free lunch to all students at a school receiving the funds from the Concentration of Poverty Grant.

I am a former educator and attended schools within the state of Maryland's. During my many years teaching and tutoring in Maryland, the story of hungry students and struggling parents was overheard often.

As a student I witnessed the snatching of lunch trays to students who didn't have money or had a substantial amount of lunch debt. A hot meal being snatched away in place of a cold sandwich was never a fair trade off for the child needing energy to thrive in the next class period. Many school staff members kept loose bills and coins to try to help students who were facing lunch debt. Teachers kept snack drawers and cabinets to offer a bit of sustenance to the student who "forgot" their lunch or couldn't afford it. There were many students who suffered from shame and pride or didn't want to bring shame to their parents so they wouldn't accept help.

The 2020 Annie E. Case Foundation's KIDS COUNT Data Center reports that 12% of children in Maryland are living in poverty. For too long our systems have shamed and punished those who are impoverished. Impoverished families often struggle to consistently meet the basic needs of the household which can result in nutritional deficits that can impact school

performance (United Health Foundation, 2022). If the state would like to see an improvement within our schools feeding our children and removing the disesteem associated with school lunch debt is sure to have more positive impact as they grow and learn.

I implore you, please pass this bill and feed our children.

Sincerely,

Shaquintay Johnson

Full Citation:

America's Health Rankings analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture, Household Food Security in the United States Report, United Health Foundation, AmericasHealthRankings.org, Accessed 2022.

SB971_CIF-fav.pdf

Uploaded by: Steven Mandel

Position: FAV



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM (CIF) OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE IN
SUPPORT OF SB 971
CONCENTRATION OF POVERTY SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM – SCHOOL LUNCH
ON MARCH 15, 2022**

FAVORABLE

CIF is a coalition of three synagogues in Montgomery County, Kol Shalom, Adat Shalom, and Temple Beth Ami, with over 1750 households. CIF serves as a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on issues that relate to the sanctity and primacy of human life. CIF provides this testimony in support of SB 971, which would provide State funding for free breakfasts and lunches in Maryland schools.

CIF recognizes that even before the COVID pandemic, there were a large number of families, particularly families of color, that struggled with food insecurity. The pandemic only increased the number of families struggling with covering basic human needs, such as food. According to the FRAC dashboard of December 2021 (based on the USDA Household Pulse Survey), 10.8% of Black households and 23% of Latinx households in Maryland were food insufficient. Recent inflation and rising food costs have been particularly challenging for families with limited incomes. Research shows that hungry children do not learn as well as children who are well nourished, and hunger also affects their physical and emotional well-being. Food Research and Action Center (2021), "School Meals are Essential for Student Health and Learning," available at <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning.pdf>.

SB 971 would ensure that all schools that receive a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program provide free breakfast and lunch to all their students. The bill thus builds off the important investments made in the 2019 BluePrint Bill for Maryland's Future by supporting equity in the classroom and making sure that every child has the nutrition he or she needs in order to excel. Further, HB 857 would ensure that through the 2022-2023 school year, all students in Maryland's schools would continue to receive free breakfast and lunch, as occurred during the past two years as a result of the Department of Agriculture waivers. Offering universal free meals not only assures that each child has a minimum level of nourishment, but also removes the stigma associated with means-tested school meals programs, opens the program to families not currently eligible due to the low-income cutoff, and eliminates administrative burdens for schools.

CIF requests a favorable report on SB 971.

SB971 MdSNATestimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Marla LeTourneau

Position: FWA



Maryland Senate Bill 971

Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program

School Lunch Position: **Favorable w/ Amendment**

Maryland has been a national leader in combating childhood hunger for decades. From launching the free, statewide school breakfast program, Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA), in 1998 to eliminating reduced-price meals in the 2018 Maryland Cares for Kids Act¹, the State has demonstrated a commitment to student health time and time again. Even as we grappled with the onset of a global pandemic, Maryland enhanced students' access to healthy school meals through the 2020 Student Meal Programs and Meal Charge Policy, which prohibits lunch shaming in every school across the State. The Maryland School Nutrition Association (MdSNA) is proud to collaborate with local and statewide partners to ensure students have access to nutritious school meals. As such, we eagerly support the State's adoption of fully funded, free meals for all students, assuming Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) retain community-driven control over program operations.

As written, Senate Bill (SB) 971 does not serve all Maryland students. For fiscal year 2022, nearly 700,000 students would not have access to state-supported, universal free meals². With increasing inflation, gas prices and expenses to a household, the MdSNA is concerned about those students who may be facing hidden poverty. More than 1,000 Maryland schools would not be eligible to receive SB 971 funding, and thus unable to provide universal meals at no cost to students. This inequity within and between districts creates unnecessary operational hardships, while exacerbating the imbalance of available services for students in need.

School Food and Nutrition (FNS) Departments are designed to be self-sustaining enterprises. According to federal research, the cost to produce a school lunch in 2014 was \$3.81, while the federal free reimbursement was only \$3.32³. The average FNS Department's revenues met only 97% of operational

¹ Full implementation of the 2018 Maryland Cares for Kids Act, including elimination of reduced-price school meals, does not go into effect until 2023.

² For fiscal year 2022, a public school eligible for the per pupil grant must have at least an 80% poverty level.

³ Hanson, Melanie. "School Lunch Debt" EducationData.org, October 12, 2021, <https://educationdata.org/school-lunch-debt>.

costs⁴. Since that study, costs have continued to increase at rates that exceed federal subsidy. Oftentimes, when FNS Departments incur financial losses, the district must pull monies from its general fund, potentially jeopardizing wraparound services and resources necessary for students' educational development. The MdSNA is calling on the General Assembly to clearly delineate the per meal funding that will be provided to LEAs for providing healthy meals at no cost to all students. We ask the State to provide public school funding equal to the difference between the federal reimbursement for a free lunch and the full price paid lunch.

Lastly, SB 971 requires an LEA to apply for and participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). The CEP-eligible schools that are currently not participating have done extensive analysis on current and projected participation, operational and financial feasibility, impact on educational aid, and community support. While already serving a significant proportion of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals, most of these schools welcome the opportunity to offer all students meals at no cost. However, achieving universal school meals through CEP would be detrimental, not only to FNS operations, but to the school's Title I and Compensatory Education operations as well. The MdSNA wants to feed all students; we do not want to do so at the loss of other vital services, such as after school enrichment, community engagement opportunities or educational resources. Therefore, if a school will lose funding in Title I or Compensatory Education aid, federal meal reimbursement, or via other revenue sources, the MdSNA requests an exemption from the CEP requirement.

In conclusion, MdSNA supports a fully funded, universal meal program for all students, if LEAs retain operational autonomy. Schools provide transportation and Chromebooks to students at no cost. Shouldn't healthy meals be the same?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mary Klatko

MdSNA Legislative Chair

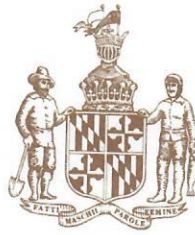
⁴ US Department of Agriculture. "The Cost of Producing School Meals Has Increased" June 2021, https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS_infographic4_CostofProducingSchoolMeals.pdf.

SB971_SenYoung_FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Ronald Young

Position: FWA

RONALD N. YOUNG
Legislative District 3
Frederick County



Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 301
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3575 · 301-858-3575
800-492-7122 Ext. 3575
Fax 410-841-3193 · 301-858-3193
Ronald.Young@senate.state.md.us

Budget and Taxation Committee
Chair, Executive Nominations Committee

Senate Chair, Joint Subcommittee on
Program Open Space/Agricultural Land
Preservation

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review

The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

District Office
253 East Church Street, Suite 100
Frederick, Maryland 21701
301-662-8520
Fax 301-662-8521

March 15, 2022

SB971 - SUPPORT

Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program- School Lunch

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

SB971 requires schools that receive a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program to provide a free school lunch and breakfast to all pupils.

In 2019, about one in 10 Marylanders¹ and 1 in 8 children lived below the poverty line.² In that same school year, however, only half of Maryland's 24 school districts met the national goal for providing school breakfasts for those who were eligible.³ We need to do better.

Poverty leads to financial constraints and to insufficient and/or poor nutrition. SB971 seeks to reduce the disparities in the academic and physical development of children from lower income homes in line with the BluePrint by providing both consistent and nutritious meals that are known to have positive benefits on learning.⁴

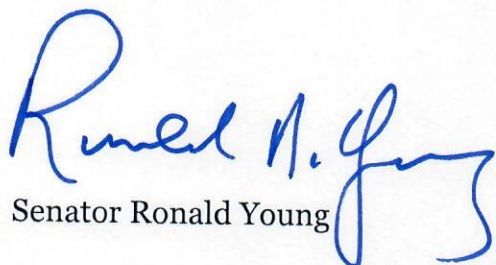
Children do not learn well when they are hungry. Without adequate energy from food, students may fall asleep in school or be unable to pay attention in classes.⁵ Malnutrition can also leave students susceptible to illness or lead to headaches and stomach aches, resulting in school absences.⁶ The brain develops rapidly at a young age and if it does not develop properly there can be long term effects on learning abilities and academic achievement.^{7,8,9}

Providing free healthy school meals for all Maryland children has successfully occurred through the pandemic federal waivers but these waivers will expire in the summer. SB971 will extend this funding through SY 2022-2023 and in high poverty community schools permanently.

Critically, SB 971 assures that all children in an eligible school, even those living above the poverty line, can benefit from consistent nutritious food. This eliminates the stigma of being singled out as needing a free or reduced-price school meal, and the problem of parents not receiving information on available meals.¹⁰ It helps low-income families to make ends meet. Since it is one system for a school, it also simplifies administrative processes, allowing principals and teachers to focus more on education.¹¹

I ask that you vote favorably on **SB971** to demonstrate that we are working to reduce the inequities of poverty and to enhance the development of children's minds and bodies by providing a nutritious breakfast and lunch.

Respectfully,



Senator Ronald Young

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AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

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BY: Senator Young
(To be offered in the Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 971
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, in line 2, before "**Lunch**" insert "**Breakfast and**"; in lines 4 and 6, in each instance, before "lunch" insert "**breakfast and**"; and in line 8, in each instance, after "school" insert "**breakfast and**".

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 3, in line 11, before "**LUNCH**" insert "**BREAKFAST AND**".

On page 5, in lines 3 and 5, in each instance, before "**LUNCH**" insert "**BREAKFAST AND**".