

March 3, 2022

2022 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
HB0857: Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

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

COMMITTEE: Ways and Means

POSITION: Testimony of Support of House Bill 0857

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 HB857 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 to 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