



HB857 EDUCATION - CONCENTRATION OF POVERTY SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM - SCHOOL LUNCH

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WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

OPPOSE

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **HB857 Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch**. This legislation 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. It prohibits a county board of education from charging students for school lunch at an eligible school. The legislation also requires certain funding to be provided in the State budget to provide certain students with free school lunch.

AACPS recognizes the importance of developing a healthy school environment which promotes student health, well-being, and the ability to learn. Healthy school environments meet nutrition standards and guidelines for food and beverages available on the school campus in accordance with State and federal laws and regulations which promote food comprised of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and protein. These State and federal requirements, in conjunction with locally developed and implemented policies, appropriately ensure that public schools meet the nutritional needs of students.

While well-intentioned, AACPS has concerns with this legislation. AACPS currently receives per pupil funding for students who receive free and reduced-price meals. This bill could negatively impact that funding source. Similar to the Community Eligibility Program (CEP), this legislation would result in an unfunded mandate to the district. Each year, AACPS completes a financial analysis regarding the benefits of applying for participation in CEP, and each year the results are the same: CEP would cost the school system money to operate. The cost to participate in the program varies depending on the number of eligible schools, though it ranges from \$100,000 to more than \$250,000 a year for just 7-10 schools. The district is similarly concerned that this legislation would come at a cost and this would, ultimately, have a negative impact on students.

The legislation would also reduce the amount of funding the school system receives for Compensatory Aid and Title 1 funding. A reduction in funding for these programs could be significant and adversely affect the very students this bill seeks to assist. Accordingly, AACPS is concerned that this bill would actually have a negative impact on educational equity as it could result in reduced funding for programs which serve underserved students.

This legislation also indicates that the State Superintendent shall determine the amount of funding provided to this Program. The bill, however, fails to mention what the reimbursement rate would be for a free student lunch at the eligible schools. Would the reimbursement from the State match the federal reimbursement rate for other free students in schools not eligible for this grant? Here again there is potential for a loss of much needed funding.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on HB857.