

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB680
BALTIMORE COUNTY – PROPERTY TAX CREDIT – SUPERMARKETS

Ways & Means Committee
February 15, 2022

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Washington and Committee Members,

The Student Support Network, a non-profit organization, assists students in poverty in Baltimore County Public Schools. With over half the students in the system now living in severe poverty and qualifying for Free/Reduced Price Meals, thousands of these students experience food insecurity, a lack of consistent access to nutritious food. At least 30% of high school students, and 28% of middle school students in Baltimore County suffer from food insecurity. Students experiencing food insecurity are at a higher risk of drug use, making a suicide plan, fighting at school, and carrying weapons to school.

Access to healthy food is one of the top priorities of our organization and our advocacy efforts, and this access to nutritious food is extremely difficult for thousands of families in Baltimore County who currently live in food deserts. Recent data reported by Reuters, [U.S. Kids Go Hungry as Safety Net Ebbs and Inflation Soars - Bloomberg](#) shows that students in poverty are facing health problems, including increased dental decay and obesity, as families switch to cheaper, high calorie foods.

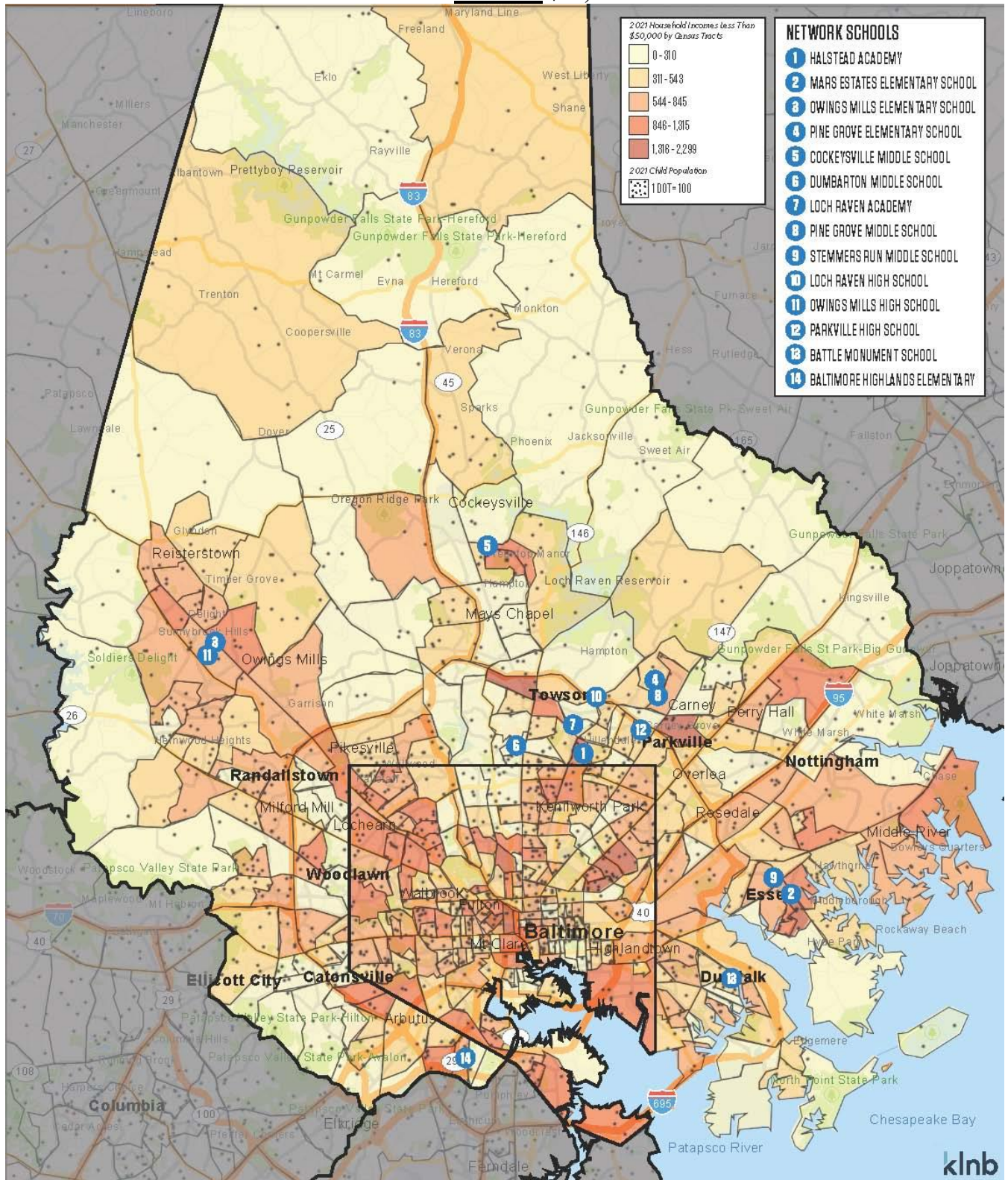
But a major problem here is also easy access - the food carrying major health risks is also much easier to obtain, from gas stations to fast-food restaurants in areas without supermarkets.

HB680, calling for a property tax credit for supermarkets in food desert areas, would improve the health of residents in these areas by making healthier food accessible. We support this bill and other efforts to create better access to nutritious food, particularly for children, who often have little choice in what foods they are given. Please feel free to contact me if you would like more information about the effects of food insecurity.

Regards,

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Map of schools with Student Support Network Programs and 2021 Census Tracts indicating child populations (each dot represents 100 children); Colors indicate households with incomes less than \$50,000



Map Courtesy of KNLB Commercial Real Estate Services

BCPS: Student Poverty Data

Since 2006, the level of student poverty in BCPS, as defined by students qualifying for Free and Reduced Price Meals (FARMS), has increased by 60%. (Data source: https://businessservices.bcps.org/departments/business_services_operations/food_and_nutrition_services/free_and_reduced-price_meal_benefits/free_and_reduced_statistics)

To qualify for FARMS, a family of four can make no more than \$49,025.

However, the “survival budget” income needed by a family of four to be self-sufficient in Maryland, with no savings possible, is **\$87,000**. (Source: United Way of Central Maryland, <https://www.uwcm.org/alice>), Fig. 4.

Although the pandemic has hit many families, poverty has been increasing throughout Baltimore County for the last 15 years. Here are a few examples from Student Support Network schools:

	Poverty Level in 2006	Poverty Level in 2020	Percent Change
Loch Raven High School	14%	48%	243% Increase
Pine Grove Middle School	19%	47%	147% Increase
Owings Mills High School	30%	62%	106% Increase
All BCPS Schools	33%	53%	60% Increase

From 2019 to 2020, overall student poverty increased by 10% in BCPS; 53% of all students are now eligible for FARMS, about 59,000 students in the system.

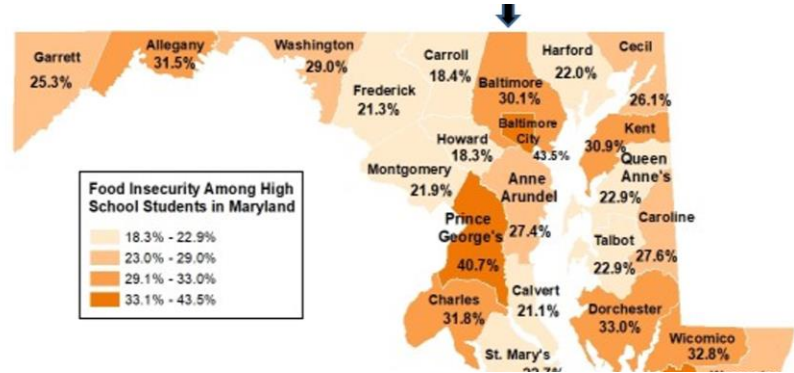
Effect of Food Insecurity on Students

Food insecurity is defined as a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life. To measure food insecurity among students in Maryland’s schools, the following food insecurity question was added to the 2018 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)/ Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS) survey. ([Source](#))

“During the past 12 months, how often was your family worried that your food would run out before you got money to buy more?” Answer choices: Often, sometimes, never

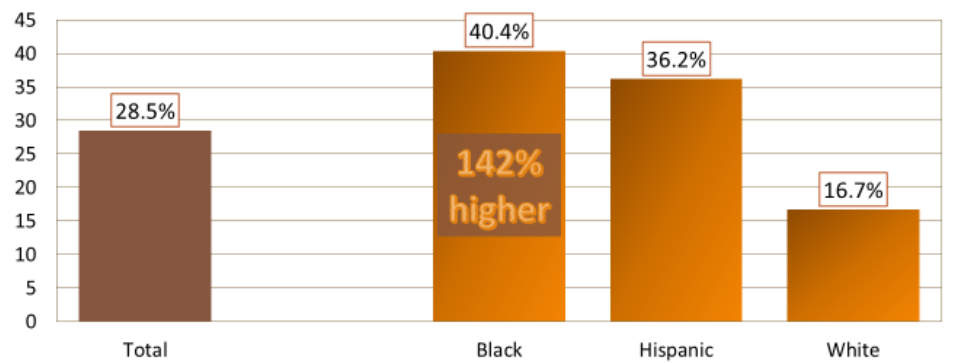
Note: The maps and graphics below are from “Food Insecurity Among Middle and High School Students in Maryland,” which was written in part by Tam Lynne Kelley, a SSN Board member and Chair of the Advocacy Committee for the Network. (Source: <https://state.nokidhungry.org/maryland/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2020/08/Food-Insecurity-Among-Middle-and-High-School-Students-in-Maryland-Aug-27-2020.pdf>)

The survey found that 28% of all Maryland High School students are food insecure. The rate of food insecurity for High School students in Baltimore County Public Schools is 30.1%.



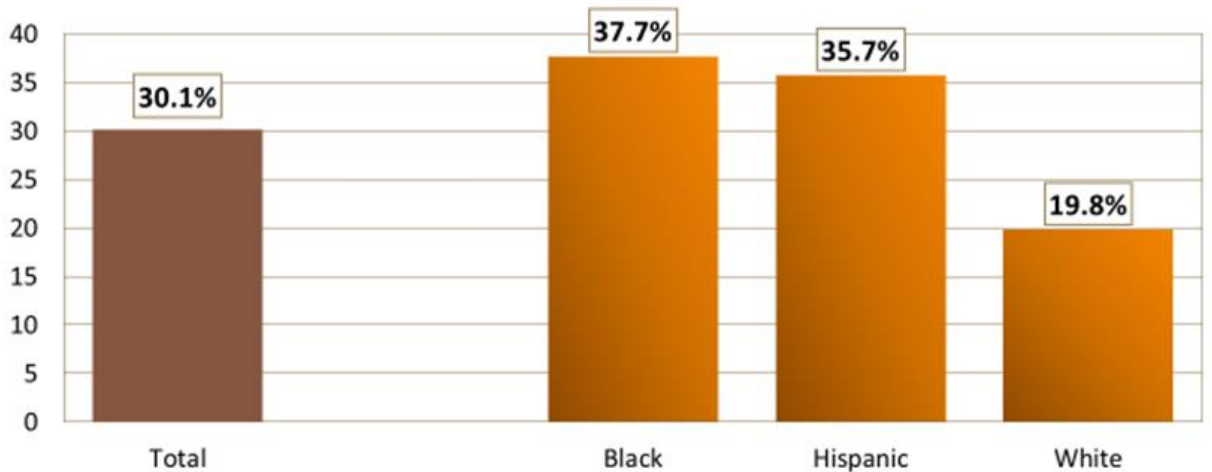
The food insecurity rate for Middle School Students in Baltimore County is 28.5% -- like the food insecurity rate for High School Students, the Middle School Student rate is also higher than the state average (25%).

Percentage of Food Insecure Baltimore County Middle School Students



*B > W, H > W (Based on t-test analysis, p < 0.05.)
 All Hispanic students are included in the Hispanic category. All other races are non-Hispanic.
 This graph contains weighted results.

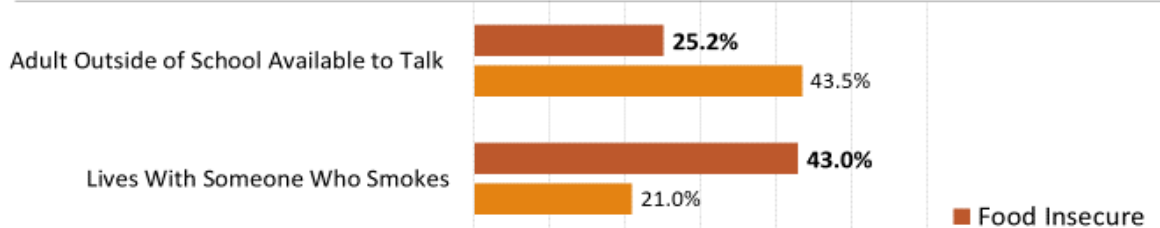
Students of color attending BCPS are at a much higher risk of food insecurity. The following chart shows the disparities for High School Students in BCPS. The disparities by race are even more pronounced in Middle School Students, with 40% of Black students and 36% of Hispanic Middle School Students in Baltimore County experiencing food insecurity as compared to 17% of white Middle School Students.



B > W, H > W (Based on t-test analysis, p < 0.05.)
 All Hispanic students are included in the Hispanic category. All other races are non-Hispanic.
 This graph contains weighted results.

As indicated in the charts below, the YRBS/YTS survey results also indicate that students who are food insecure are at an increased risk for poor health and risky health behaviors.

Health Disparities for Baltimore County Middle School Students Who are Food Insecure



Health Disparities for Baltimore County High School Students Who are Food Insecure

