



Maryland HB 857

Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program

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

The Maryland School Nutrition Association (MdSNA) represents the thousands of school food service employees across the State of Maryland who served millions of meals to students last year. As the President of the Association, I am honored to provide this testimony on their behalf. As we are committed to our students and nutrition, we strongly support the concepts of HB 857 and believe in the spirit, which aims to expand access of school meals to all students. However, Universal Meals should provide an equal playing field for all students, because as we all know a hungry student cannot learn. We are unable to support this bill as written with the stipulation that schools receiving a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program are eligible for CEP must apply. Schools that have a lower percentage of directly certified students will suffer from the loss of reimbursement as a CEP school. This may also affect Title 1 or Comp Ed funding for schools. If a school will lose funding in Title 1, Comp Ed or federal reimbursement MdSNA would propose that these schools be exempt from the stipulation to apply for CEP. We would ask that the state provide public school funding equal to the difference between the federal reimbursement for a free lunch and the full price of the lunch for each student who is ineligible for a free or reduced-price lunch and receives lunch.

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. That's why we feel it is important to continue to feed all students in Maryland, not just those that qualify for meals. Therefore, the Maryland School

Nutrition Association requests a **Favorable w/ Amendment** report on HB 857. Making all students eligible to receive free meals, with the State with the State paying the difference from the Federal Reimbursement. Thank you for your time and attention in reviewing this testimony.

Barbara Harral, RDN President, Maryland School Nutrition Association