

HB680_Brooks_Support.pdf

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Position: FAV

BENJAMIN BROOKS
Legislative District 10
Baltimore County

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Economic Matters Committee

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Alcoholic Beverages

Property and Casualty Insurance



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

Ways & Means Committee
February 15, 2022

Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Washington and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on HB680, Baltimore County – Property Tax Credit- Supermarkets. HB680 provides a property tax credit for supermarkets located in a food desert retail incentive area.

The USDA defines a food desert as a low-income tract where a substantial number or substantial share of residents does not have easy *access* to a supermarket or large grocery store. According to a study by Towson University in 2018, 64% of zip codes in Baltimore County are considered food deserts and contain predominantly low-income and minority neighborhoods.

While Baltimore County residents are able to acquire food, the fact that they live in “food deserts” means they do not have convenient access to fresh or nutritious foods from retailers. More often than not, individuals and families living in food deserts rely on pre-packaged and processed foods which are high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat. This kind of diet leads to health problems such as obesity, high cholesterol, heart disease, and more.

HB680 will empower Baltimore County to combat its food deserts by giving property tax incentives to grocery stores that open in these areas. This will give previously underserved communities access to healthier choices and improve quality of life outcomes. Additionally, a County Health Rankings & Roadmaps study found that grocery stores “can improve perceptions of food access, neighborhood satisfaction, and mental health” as well. Lastly, incentivizing grocery stores to open in predominantly low-income and minority neighborhoods would boost the economy by providing jobs to the areas that need them most.

For these reasons, I am requesting a favorable report.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Benjamin T. Brooks'.

Benjamin Brooks

HB680_Food Desert One Pager.pdf

Uploaded by: Benjamin Brooks

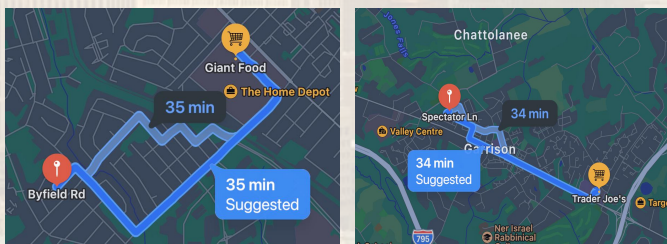
Position: FAV

What is a food desert?

“The term ‘food desert’ means an area in the United States with **limited access** to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of **predominantly lower-income neighborhoods and communities.**”
(Food, Conservation, and Energy Act, 2008)

Who in Baltimore County Lives in a Food Desert?

According to a 2018 data study by Towson University, both Baltimore County and Baltimore City have almost the same percentage of zip codes that are considered food deserts. **In Baltimore County, 64.29 percent are food deserts.** In Baltimore City it's 64.58 percent.

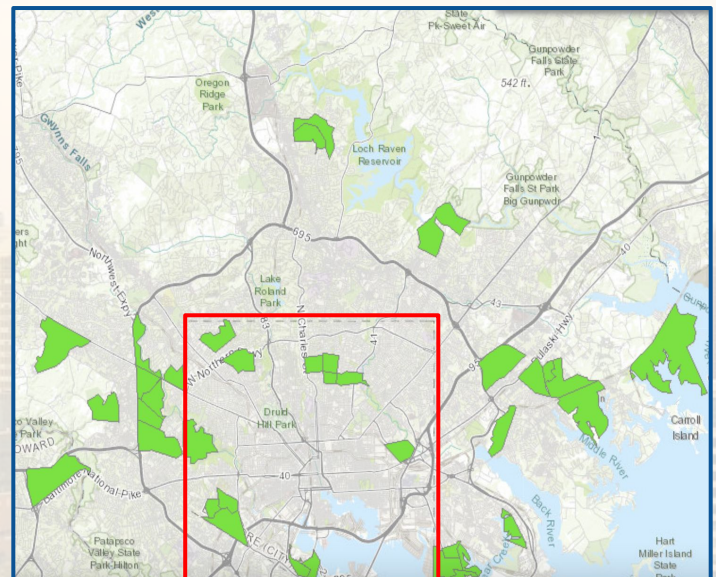


To make matters worse, the Baltimore City 2018 Food Environment Brief, found more than **30 percent of households that are in a food desert do not have a vehicle available.** Without a car in suburban communities, a trip to a supermarket could take between **30 minutes to an hour.**

Racial and Income Disparities

Since food deserts offer a lower variety of healthy food options, residents of these areas are less likely to have a balanced diet—leading to **adverse health outcomes among disadvantaged groups.**

Highlighted in Green are areas deemed to be **low-income and low food access** by the USDA



Areas just outside Baltimore City especially along the Baltimore Beltway and other major highways are prone to low food access. **This could affect the diet and health of thousands of low-income Baltimore County residents.**

Desert to Oasis: Tackling Baltimore County's Food Deserts

*"Local policymakers should be looking at **the quality of infrastructure** in poor and minority neighborhoods to see if it could **better support businesses.** . . and they should think about ways to **incentivize supermarkets to locate in minority neighborhoods.**" - Kelly Brown, Assistant Professor at JHU School of Nursing*

This bill proposes giving tax credits to grocery stores that open and operate in Baltimore County's food deserts. This would give Baltimore County's disadvantaged communities greater access to healthy food options and potentially help **mitigate the adverse health outcomes** related to poor nutrition. Additionally, the tax credits would help **promote local businesses and jobs** in the communities that need it most.

HB680_Student Support Network_Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Benjamin Brooks

Position: FAV

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.

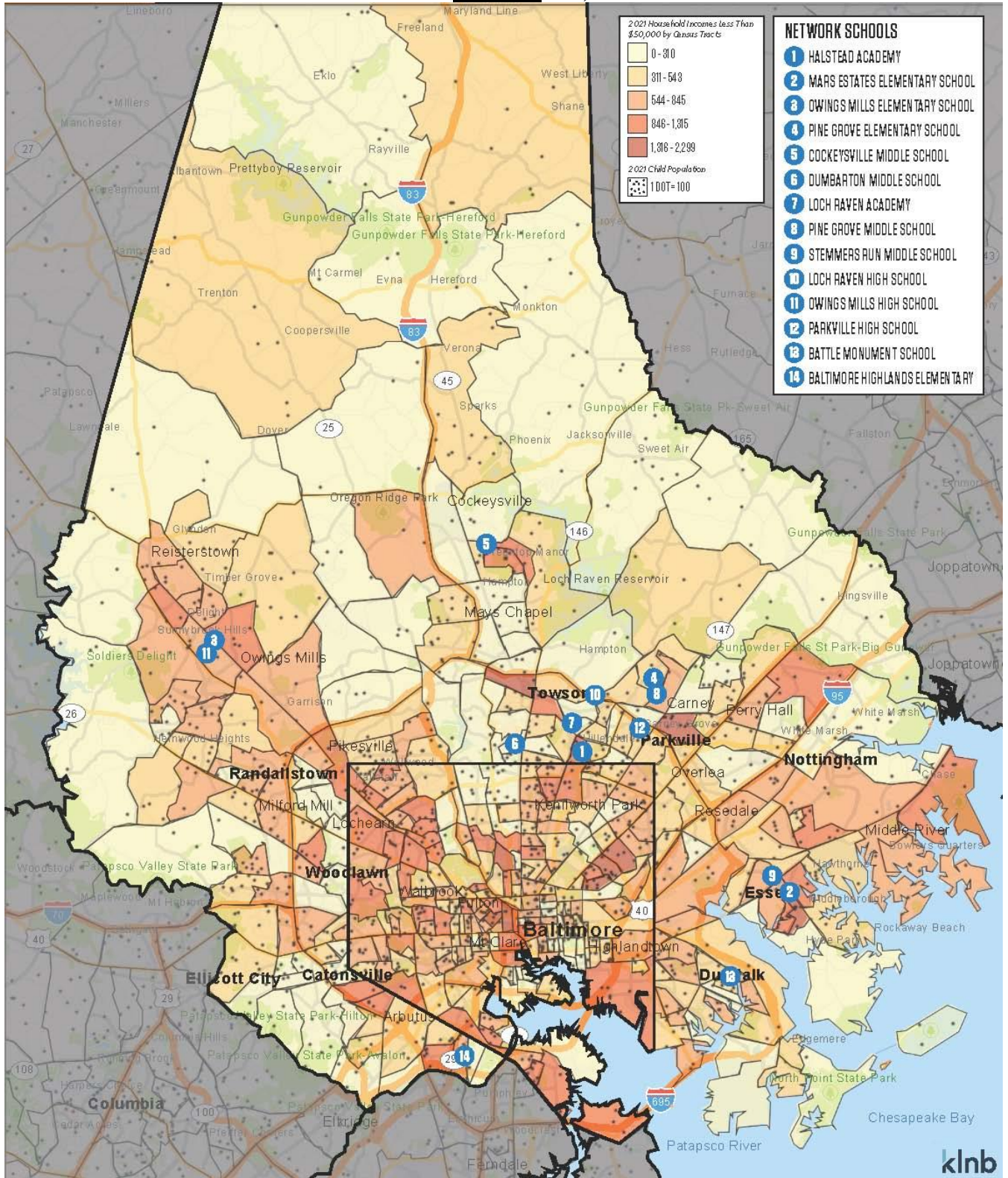
But a major problem here is also easy access - the food carrying major health risks is also much easier to obtain, from gas stations to fast-food restaurants in areas without supermarkets.

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,

Laurie Taylor-Mitchell, Ph.D.
President, Student Support Network
www.studentsupportnetwork.org
410-583-0774

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.

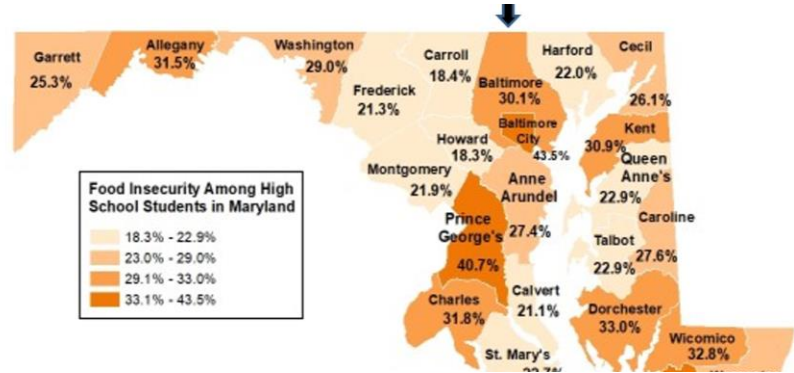
Effect of Food Insecurity on Students

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

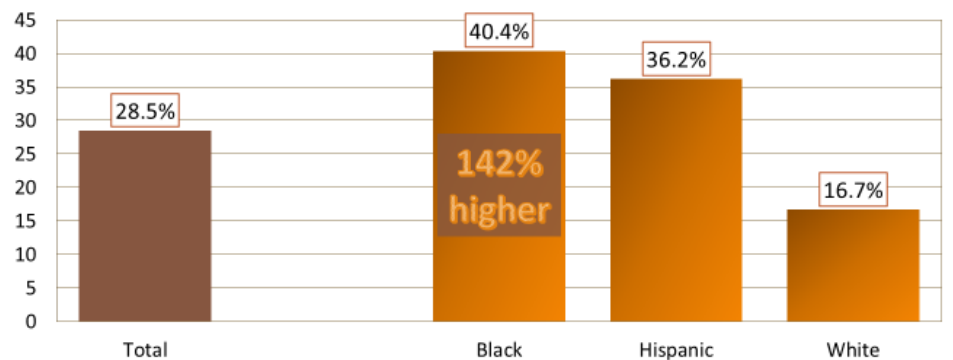
Note: The maps and graphics below are from “Food Insecurity Among Middle and High School Students in Maryland,” which was written in part by Tam Lynne Kelley, a SSN Board member and Chair of the Advocacy Committee for the Network. (Source: <https://state.nokidhungry.org/maryland/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2020/08/Food-Insecurity-Among-Middle-and-High-School-Stud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



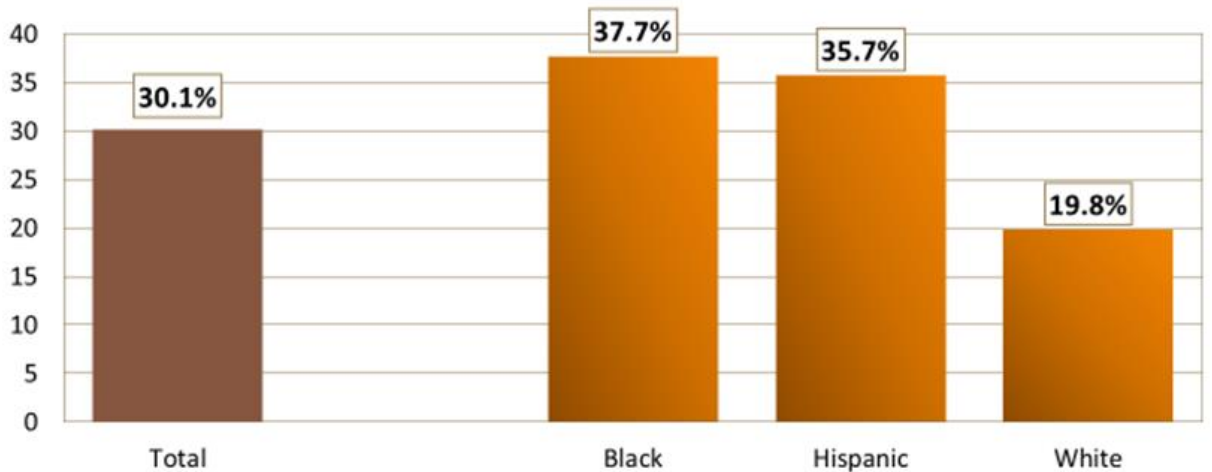
The food insecurity rate for Middle School Students in Baltimore County is 28.5% -- like the food insecurity rate for High School Students, the Middle School Student rate is also higher than the state average (25%).

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.

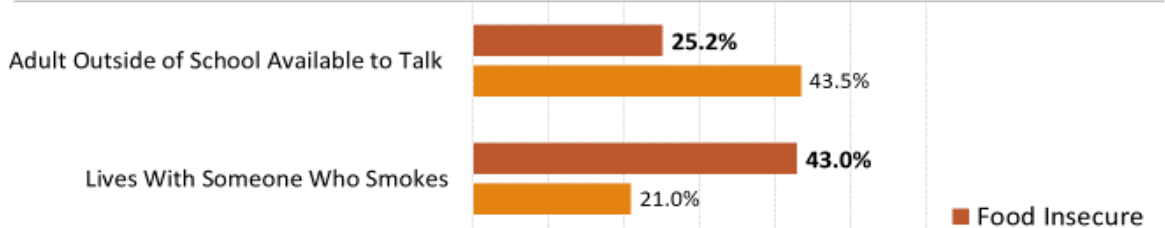
Students of color attending BCPS are at a much higher risk of food insecurity. The following chart shows the disparities for High School Students in BCPS. The disparities by race are even more pronounced in Middle School Students, with 40% of Black students and 36% of Hispanic Middle School Students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



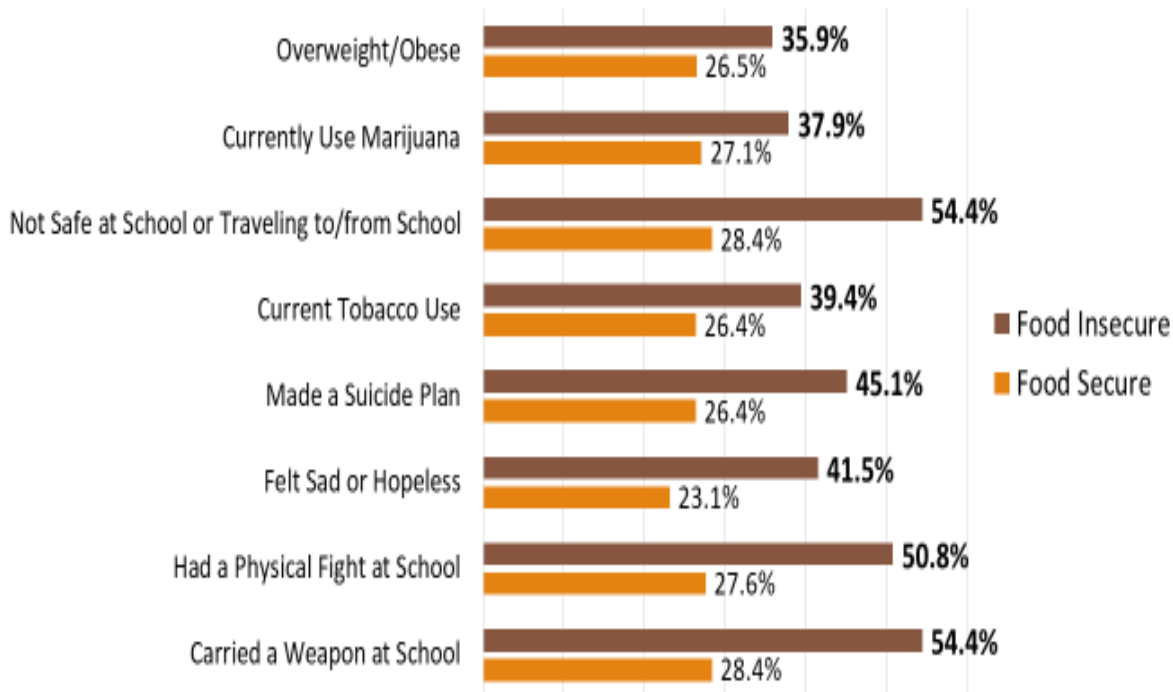
B > W, H > W (Based on t-test analysis, p < 0.05.)
 All Hispanic students are included in the Hispanic category. All other races are non-Hispanic.
 This graph contains weighted results.

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



BaltimoreCounty_FAV_HB0680.pdf

Uploaded by: Joel Beller

Position: FAV



JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.
County Executive

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JOSHUA M. GREENBERG
Associate Director of Government Affairs

MIA R. GOGEL
Associate Director of Government Affairs

BILL NO.: **House Bill 680**

TITLE: Baltimore County – Property Tax Credit - Supermarkets

SPONSOR: Delegate Brooks

COMMITTEE: Ways and Means

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: February 15, 2022

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** House Bill 680 – Baltimore County – Property Tax Credit – Supermarkets. This legislation would allow Baltimore County to grant a tax credit to a supermarket in a designated food desert.

The disbursement of supermarkets across Maryland has created pockets where residents without personal transportation cannot access food, putting many at risk of food insecurity. The pandemic has created additional barriers to food accessibility by limiting the availability of transit and rising unemployment making basic needs unaffordable. Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski has implemented numerous services during the pandemic to combat food insecurity in Baltimore County, including expanded food distribution for elderly adults and a free grocery shuttle. While these initiatives have provided some relief, there is more work to be done.

House Bill 680 provides a tax credit for supermarkets locating in areas considered to be food deserts. By incentivizing supermarkets in areas of food insecurity, more residents of the State will have access to affordable and healthy food products. This will assist in cutting rates of hunger for all citizens of Maryland, regardless of their income.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 680. For more information, please contact Joel Beller, Acting Director of Government Affairs at jbeller@baltimorecountymd.gov.

HB680_MRA_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Price

Position: FAV

MARYLAND RETAILERS ASSOCIATION

The Voice of Retailing in Maryland



HB680 – Baltimore County – Property Tax Credit – Supermarkets
Ways and Means Committee
February 15, 2022

Position: Favorable

Background: HB680 authorizes the government of Baltimore County to issue a tax credit against the personal property tax for new supermarkets that are constructed in food desert areas as defined by the County government.

Comments: The Maryland Retailers Association (MRA) strongly supports the property tax credit proposed in HB680. This creative approach to address food access would positively impact retailers' decisions about where to expand within the state. Food retailers like grocery stores typically operate with the lowest profit margins in the retail industry at 1-3%. A property tax credit would help offset some of the costs associated with constructing and opening a new store.

With this in mind, we would strongly urge a favorable report on HB680. Thank you for your consideration.