



Welfare Advocates

Founded 1979

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House Bill 514

Education – Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program – Annual Appropriation

House Appropriations Committee

February 28, 2022

Support

Welfare Advocates is a statewide coalition of social service organizations, advocacy groups, faith communities, and community members, whose mission it is to educate about and advocate for an adequate safety net and public policies that support families moving towards economic stability.

Welfare Advocates strongly supports HB 514, which increases the annual appropriation for the Maryland Meals for Achievement program from \$7,550,000 to \$12,050,000.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed our programs, our economy and our communities. Before the pandemic, one in ten Marylanders lived at or below the Federal Poverty Line. When the pandemic began, safety-net program caseloads skyrocketed as more individuals and families in Maryland tumbled into economic insecurity. The pandemic has laid bare longstanding inequities in our systems and put a spotlight on the entrenched gaps and barriers that have long existed in our programs and policies to address and end poverty, especially for communities of color that have disproportionately borne the brunt of the pandemic due to systemic racism and historic disinvestment. It takes the longest for those with the lowest incomes to recover from economic crises, and the state should make critical investments in programs that are proven to ameliorate poverty, like Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA).

MMFA is a state-funded, in-classroom breakfast program that provides access to regular, healthy breakfast meals in schools across the state. By providing access to free breakfast to all students in participating schools, MMFA reduces barriers, such as cost and stigma, to breakfast participation. For 25 years, Maryland has provided this critical support to students in high-poverty schools, and MMFA is a nationally recognized best practice with a long track record of reducing food insecurity among students.

Unfortunately, current funding for MMFA does not allow all eligible schools to participate. Schools where 40% or more of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced-Price School Meals can apply to be an MMFA school. Current funding for the program allows 616 schools to participate, yet another 123 schools are eligible and not yet participating due to insufficient funding for the program. Especially with rising costs of inflation, now is a pivotal moment to expand access to free breakfast as part of the school day to all schools eligible for MMFA.

Maryland Meals for Achievement is an essential investment in the health, wellbeing, and academic success of Maryland's children. Offering breakfast in the classroom at no cost to all students supports equity in the classroom by making sure every child has the nutrition they need in order to excel. School meals are an essential component to education, and are linked to reduced food insecurity, improved academic achievement, improved school attendance, and improved overall health. HB 514 is a smart investment for the future of our students, and also the future of our State.

WA appreciates your consideration, and respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 514.

Submitted by Lisa Kligenmaier, Chair of Welfare Advocates
