

February 8, 2023

FAVORABLE

TO: members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Students to End Poverty (STEP)

My name is Dylan Weber, submitting this testimony in support of HB 514, the Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program, which would ensure that Maryland would provide breakfast and lunch to all students attending low-income schools.

I am a member of Students to End Poverty, which is a student-run organization based in Montgomery County. Our mission is to advance policy on a state and local level that looks after the interests of lower-income Marylanders. We have advocated for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future bill, helped create the Maryland Student Investment Act, and supported Del. Solomon's affordable housing efforts.

Through these efforts, the importance of a quality K-12 education has become apparent. HB514 is a vital step towards creating an equitable playing field in Maryland.

In a structurally flawed educational system that puts low-income students at an academic disadvantage, no student should face further obstacles in the form of food insecurity. Maryland's school systems have the capacity to ease the burden placed on these students by providing all students with free breakfast and lunch. It is imperative that we take the action necessary to ensure all students are given the necessary opportunities to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

25% of all middle school students in Maryland are food insecure. 28% of all high school students in Maryland are food insecure. If you look at just black kids the number is 39%, with Hispanic kids it is 38%, and with Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, it is 46% of kids who have food insecurities. This adds up to over 200,000 kids in Maryland who live with food insecurities. Food insecurities lead to higher rates of diabetes, hospitalization, and asthma. One study showed that kids living with food insecurities are 16% more likely to be feeling "sad or hopeless"

The proposed bill would allow students attending low-income schools to get free breakfast and lunch from their school. This would both help students to overcome food insecurity, but also lower tardy and absentee rates. Additionally, a study from a New Jersey Public university showed that students with food insecurities were more likely to have a GPA in the bottom 10% and less likely to have a GPA in the top 10%. HB514 would help take kids out of food insecurity and raise their level of education. In light of these facts, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB514

Thank you,

Dylan Weber
Bethesda Chevy Chase High School
Students to End Poverty (STEP)