

TO: House Economic Matters Committee, and members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Elisha Mae Gabriel

My name is Elisha Mae Gabriel, 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 through 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.

As a child who grew up in many impoverished areas, I was able to see the difference food makes on children's education. 12% of children in Baltimore live under the poverty line. 12% of children do not live with adequate resources for better chances. Food is energy, with that lack of energy, how do we expect our future generation to be great. With the economy now, eggs are expensive. Basic food necessities are overpriced. We need to give back to those who need the food.

Meals at school could be the only meals that these children receive. With the addition of free breakfast, the meal that is the most nourishing for the day, we can help our next generation of students to get through the day. With this proposed bill, I hope we can also bring children home with food.

In light of these facts, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB514.

Thank you,

Elisha Mae Gabriel
Sherwood High School
Students to End Poverty (STEP)