

February 13, 2023

FAVORABLE

TO: Members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Ach'sah Gubena

My name is Ach'sah Gubena, 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'm involved with Students to End Poverty, 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 individuals. We have previously 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.

It is unacceptable for any student to encounter additional challenges related to food insecurity, especially in an education system that is structurally flawed and puts low-income students at a disadvantage. To alleviate the burden on these students, Maryland's school systems should provide free breakfast and lunch for all students.

I attend a school where a significant number of students rely exclusively on the meals provided by the institution for their daily nourishment. . These students, including myself, are mostly from lower-income families and qualify for free or reduced lunches. I've been very fortunate to have been able to receive benefits and credit my performance in school throughout the years for it. Programs like the Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program, will ensure this luxury is reality for all students in Maryland.

Following the pandemic, the implementation of free meals for all students at schools across Maryland was a great decision for many students who've never had such food security. It has assisted in closing that same opportunity gap we see ravaging our school systems today. Now that it's unfortunately no longer in place, it has undoubtedly placed many students in a position that threatens their accessibility to a proper nourishment. This is why it is strongly imperative in which a permanent implementation for a program as such is placed—one that will assist in providing the same security these students once had.

Given these facts, I respectfully implore this committee to issue a favorable report on HB514.

Thank you,

Ach'sah Gubena  
Montgomery Blair High School  
Students to End Poverty (STEP)