

February 8, 2023

FAVORABLE

TO: Members of the General Assembly, and members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Rabira Dosho

My name is Rabira Dosho 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.

The national center for educational statistics states that, "The percentage of students who attended high-poverty schools was highest for Black students (45 percent), followed by Hispanic students (43 percent)." This is information, I think we all knew but reiterates the people that this bill will serve. It would be great if we could have a student who has benefited from this program to talk about their experience in the program. So happens that person is me, you don't realize it but schools mean so much to a student and their development and when it comes to immigrant students, schools can be one of the biggest factors of happiness in their lives. No matter how much money they have, or where they are from they are able to sit with classmates from across their community and form bonds that last for years to come. In a world of differences the food that students are served stands as something students have in common. This change can seem like a piece of life that seems so insignificant, but holds lots of meaning in feeling accepted with those around you. No matter what traditional dishes that are served at home we can come together and collectively avoid eating the vegetables on our plates in the cafeteria and rushing to obtain chocolate milk first. It's more than just food and its nutritional value, it becomes the culture and the development of students no matter where they are from. Frankly it isn't fair at that age to learn that inadequate access to money means inadequate access to happiness.

This extends towards the stigma that students who benefit from these programs carry when they are seen as low income students. It's so much harder to fit in when the school system puts in beneath others and categorizes them as needy. It only makes a student's path to become a part of the community harder when there is a barrier set in front of them because of things outside of their control.

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

Thank you,

Rabira Dosho
Montgomery Blair High School
Students to End Poverty (STEP)