

February 24, 2023

FAVORABLE

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

FROM: Andres Guerra, President and Founder of Kennedy Students to End Poverty

My name is Andres Guerra. I am a Junior at John F. Kennedy High School in Montgomery County and the President of my school's chapter of Students to End Poverty (STEP). My school offers free breakfast to all students. I want to paint the picture of my morning.

It's cold, the sun hasn't risen yet. I step out of the bus without any desire to be looking up at the doors to my school. But, in a sleepless daze, I am welcomed by my peers with open arms. As I see my friends and classmates eating together in the cafeteria, people from all backgrounds and ethnicities, I am energized. These are my people. I feel a sense of solidarity, that even though none of us want to be up this early, about to sit through 6 hours of lectures and assignments, we are going through this together.

I often think about these experiences, these brief moments in the morning when my day is made that much better while sitting down to enjoy breakfast with friends. And as I have been researching this bill with peers from across the county, I realized something. I realized what these experiences show about my government.

For so long and so often it seems as though we, the young, the undocumented, the low-income, and the exploited are thrown aside by the government, left to fend for ourselves. This is a turning point. To cook for someone is to invite them into your home, to fulfill their basic needs. Government, to many, can appear to be this soulless machine that divides people into voting blocs and income brackets. Providing free breakfast to all students offers hope to a new generation. Hope for a government that respects and does not divide. Hope for a government that serves to serve. Hope for a government that cares about the nourishment of its citizenry. This policy is, simply put, good governance. It is an act showing that we are not purely guided by partisanship or power or bias or prejudice but by the well-being of those the government serves and is meant to protect. To offer breakfast, community, and hope to students who would otherwise go hungry, we must expand this program to all high schools with substantial FARM rates. Give the most important part of the day to the most disenfranchised parts of our society. They will thank you for it.