



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 22, 2023

SB 559

**Education – Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program –
Annual Appropriation**

**Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Senate Education, Energy & The Environment Committee**

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 559. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 559 would provide increased funding for the Maryland Meals for Achievement Program (MMFA), which affords schools with greater concentrations of low-income students the ability to provide breakfast to all students, free of charge. In doing so, continuity in feeding low-income students would be further ensured. This continuity would also provide participating low-income families with the ability to plan their budgets accordingly if their schools were to lose eligibility for MMFA.

Although Maryland is the wealthiest state in the country, one in eight households in Maryland face constant food insecurity. One in four households in Baltimore City are food insecure. Sadly, children and adolescents are not exempt from those statistics. School breakfast and lunch programs are essential to not only ending hunger, but for improving the health and educational outcomes of students.

Pope Francis has been very outspoken about the epidemic of food insecurity in our world. He has stated, "I invite you to make space in your heart for this emergency of respecting the God-given rights of everyone to have access to adequate food. We share what we have in Christian charity with those who face numerous obstacles to satisfy such a basic need." He also invited "all of the institutions of the world, the Church, each of us, as one single human family, to give a voice to all of those who suffer silently from hunger, so that this voice becomes a roar which can shake the world." (*Message for The Campaign Against Global Hunger*, December, 2013)

Maryland Catholic schools serve hundreds of breakfasts every day to their students through the MMFA program and/or the federal free breakfast and lunch programs. Our school community recognizes the important role that breakfast plays in sustaining students throughout the day and maximizing their learning potential. Nutrition programs such as MMFA assist in Catholic schools' goal of addressing the needs of the whole child and are an important resource for students whose families are unable to provide them enough to eat. We request a favorable report for Senate Bill 559.