



**Mohammed Choudhury**  
State Superintendent of Schools

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<b>BILL:</b>	Senate Bill (SB) 557	<b>DATE:</b>	February 22, 2023
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion	<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	Budget and Taxation
<b>POSITION:</b>	Support		
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The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) enthusiastically supports Senate Bill (SB) 557 – *Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion*. This bill answers the national outcry to effectively continue the Universal Free Meals program that existed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The federal Universal Free Meals program shed light on the importance and impact of ensuring that all children have access to free meals. However, despite expanded efforts to better identify student poverty, existing measures still fall short of fully capturing eligible students and, as a result (and with the sunset of the federal universal meals program), students are again going without necessary food and nutrition services. Given the direct impact on educational services and student poverty, particularly for students who may not have access to healthy meals at home, this bill could have a profound impact on educational outcomes, particularly for students who live in circumstances of poverty.

Additionally, MSDE estimates current unpaid meal debt incurred by students and families to be more than \$750,000 based on a June 2021 survey conducted by MSDE’s Office of School and Community Nutrition Programs. Students and families will not incur additional debt if Senate Bill 557 is enacted, as drafted.

MSDE respectfully requests that you consider this letter of support as you deliberate Senate Bill 557. Please contact Justin Dayhoff, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Financial Planning, Operations, and Strategy by phone at 410-767-0439, or by email at [justin.dayhoff@maryland.gov](mailto:justin.dayhoff@maryland.gov) for additional information.