

My name is Yeabsira Getachew and I am representing the American Heart Association through MSEE, Maryland Students for Educational Equity. I am testifying in favor of Primary and Secondary Education Breakfast and Lunch program. I am an 11th grader, who attends Paint Branch High School in Burtonsville, MD. Growing up, I never preferred school lunch and was lucky enough to have a mother to pack my lunches for me. Unfortunately, many in my community did not have that luxury. I have early elementary memories of waiting for my friends to return from the lunch line. It was a rule to feed a prepackaged PB&J sandwich and a water bottle if they did not have money for hot lunch. I didn't realize the extent to which that simple lunch affected them until I forgot my own lunch one day. It was in 3rd grade. As a growing pre-teen, I sulked and finished my 2 ounce sandwich. The whole rest of the day, I sat in embarrassment as my stomach growled loudly during science and social studies. I was unable to focus, and went home and binged for the first time. Every time I left my lunch at home, and came home hungry, my binge eating habit developed. My story is one of many. Research confirms that hungry students are more likely to score lower on standardized tests, repeat a grade, be suspended from school, get sick more often and be hospitalized more frequently. That must not be taken lightly. The youth are our future, denying them of accessible lunch is the most avoidable slippery slope. I am advocating for the thousands of hungry kids nation-wide. First, we must start in the Maryland School System. Teenagers completing difficult classes, forced to study on an empty stomach. Young and naive elementary schoolers unable to speak up for themselves and ask for food. It can be solved and it must be. So I ask, every legislator in this room, please put the future first. Thank you.