
MARYLAND ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS



Date: February 22, 2023

Bill: Senate Bill 557 - Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

Committee: Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair

Position: Support

The Maryland Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND) represents nearly 1200 Registered & Licensed Dietitian/Nutritionists in the state who work in a variety of facilities and agencies to provide education related to nutrition for the benefit of the health our citizens. We would like to support **Senate Bill 557 - Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion.**

The bill will alter *“the standards of the State Free Feeding Program, beginning in fiscal year 2025, to require that if a school participates in the federal School Breakfast Program or the National School Lunch Program, then each student in the school must be offered a meal at no cost to the student; providing for the reimbursement rate at which the State shall pay county boards and participating nonpublic schools for the meals offered to students.”*

Food insecurity disrupts food intake or eating patterns due to a lack of money or resources. Food insecurity among children has been associated with adverse health, social, and academic outcomes. Child nutrition programs improve diet quality, and academic performance for low-income and food-insecure households. This legislation addresses the direct correlation between student learning outcomes and good nutrition. Moreover, improved nutrition has the potential to positively influence students’ academic performance and behavior. Though researchers are still working to definitively prove the link, existing data suggests that with better nutrition students are better able to learn, students have fewer absences, and students’ behavior improves, causing fewer disruptions in the classroom. Several studies show that nutritional status can directly affect mental capacity among school-aged children. For example, iron deficiency even in early stages, can decrease dopamine transmission, thus negatively impacting cognition. Deficiencies in other vitamins and minerals, specifically thiamine, vitamin E, vitamin B, iodine, and zinc, are shown to inhibit cognitive abilities and mental concentration. (1)

USDA school meal programs and other child nutrition programs improve food security. They do so by augmenting overall household resources and providing children with a regular source of

nutritious meals. Understanding the role that school meal programs play in the dietary adequacy of children at risk for food insecurity helps assess program effectiveness. (2)

The Maryland Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recognizes that many of the populations we serve are at risk for food insecurity. The Academy's policy recommendations for healthy food systems and access includes Food Security.

Increasing access to affordable, healthy foods and safe water in communities, places of work, and schools, helps support efforts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to link healthy food to positive health outcomes. (3)

For these reasons, we support the goals and aims of Senate Bill 557 and ask for a FAVORABLE report.

Thank you for your consideration.

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References:

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