

Testimony
Ways and Means Committee
HB 628
February 22, 2023

Good afternoon, I am Vicki Almond, a volunteer for the Student Support Network in Baltimore County. I work with many volunteers and school staff assisting students in need at Owings Mills High School and Owings Mills Elementary School in Baltimore County. We are here today to advocate for House Bill 628 to provide universal free meals for all children in Maryland Public Schools.

Food insecurity, the chronic lack of access to nutritious food, is a huge problem state-wide. You have received the statistics in your packet. I want to let you know first-hand what hunger looks like. The face of a hungry child is unforgettable. Their eyes and actions tell their story. When you are hungry, not much else matters. There is anxiety, anger, embarrassment, shame, and fear in their faces.

Years ago, before the pandemic and before food insecurity had a title, I met a cafeteria worker in one of our Elementary Schools who was giving her hard earned money to students so they could eat lunch. So many children pretend that they are not hungry to avoid the embarrassment and shame that they feel. The cafeteria worker saw these children every day – not eating. Word got out and some parents starting giving money to help feed these children. Unfortunately, this was a problem for the school. The cafeteria worker was fired and the parents were told to stop. This situation haunted me and prompted me to get involved. And I did, with the Student Support Network.

The statistics are overwhelming. Please end lack of food shaming for children once and for all. Hungry children cannot learn. There priority is food. If every child in Maryland had enough to eat everyday in school, our system could be transformed. Remember in some situations, a school meal is their only meal

Please support HB 628 to end hunger in Maryland Schools.

“Poverty is a very complicated issue, but feeding a child isn’t.”