



## **House Bill 628**

### *Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Ways and Means Committee

Date: February 22, 2023

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 628. This bill provides much-needed state support to supplement federal aid to provide free meals for all children in Maryland schools. Under HB 628, a school participating in free and reduced meal programs would have to do so universally, regardless of students' socioeconomic situation, with state funding to support these costs.

Research is clear: access to healthy, quality in-school meals improves students' educational experiences and learning performance. Furthermore, need and eligibility for free and reduced meals is growing statewide, as evidenced by recent reporting from the Department of Legislative Services that has uncovered an additional 111,000 students across Maryland who should receive free and reduced school meals.

Counties strongly support providing all of Maryland's students with quality, healthy school meals – and we are proud to collaborate with the federal government to do so. Unfortunately, many school districts aren't financially capable of doing so on their own and federal aid only supports a percentage of students in need.

HB 628 addresses this cost concern, however, by requiring the State to appropriate enough funds annually to reimburse local boards of education for any gaps in federal aid and the actualized costs of providing universal free meals for all students.

In doing so, the HB 628 will help level the playing field for all Maryland students and will eliminate social stigma in school lunchrooms across the state. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS** HB 628 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.