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HB0628 – Universal School Meals
Ways and Means Committee
Hearing Date 2/22/2023 at 1pm
Testimony of SUPPORT

Chairwoman Atterbeary and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Capital Area Food Bank, we offer our support for HB0628 to provide universal school meals to all Maryland students.

The Capital Area Food Bank serves over 200,000 food insecure residents in the two largest counties in Maryland, Prince George's and Montgomery. Last year, we distributed over 23 million meals to Maryland clients through a partner network of over 180 nonprofit organizations and more than 150 direct distribution sites.

Each year, the Capital Area Food Bank releases a Hunger Report – a comprehensive study that looks at food insecurity across the food bank's service area. One key finding from our 2022 Hunger Report was that Households with children are twice as likely to be affected by food insecurity. Survey results revealed that 49% of all households with children across the region experienced food insecurity at some point during the last year, as opposed to only 25% of households without children.

Households with young people have long been overrepresented among those served by the food bank. For parents and grandparents raising children and young adults in a region with a high cost of living, budgets can easily become stretched, and data tell us that when resources are tight, food is frequently one of the first things to be cut back.

That's why the food bank operates out-of-school and summer meal distributions, to help support families in getting the meals and groceries they need to thrive. However, we also know many of the families we serve rely on in-school meals, both school breakfasts and lunches, as a reliable, healthy source of food for their children.

During the 2020 and 2021 school years, USDA provided waivers to schools across the country, allowing school meals to be served at no cost to all students. However, these waivers have ended, and schools have reverted back to previous payment structures. This means students are going without the meals they need to focus on their education, maintain healthy happy lifestyles, and support their overall well-being.

Maryland must support students in ensuring they have the foods they need to thrive, especially during school time. We strongly encourage a favorable report on HB0628, and welcome any questions from the committee. Thank you.