



February 22, 2023

2023 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
SB0559: Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast

BILL: SB0559: Education - Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program - Annual Appropriation

COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation

POSITION: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0559

BILL ANALYSIS: Increasing the appropriation required by the Governor for the Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program from \$7,550,00 to \$12,050,00 in the annual budget bill.

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee:

The Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) urges you to **SUPPORT** the increased appropriation for the Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program, a vital program in ensuring Maryland students have access to nutritious breakfast in the classroom.

The Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) program provides state funding to supplement federal meal reimbursements so that schools can offer breakfast in the classroom for all students who qualify at no charge. Schools that have at least 40 percent of students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals are eligible. School administrators credit the MMFA with improving students' test scores, behavior, attendance, and wellbeing, and parents praise the program for assisting children to prepare for their academic day¹. The current 2022-2023 school year has 581 participating schools across the state, up from 485 in the 2018-2019 school year. Montgomery County has one of the highest rates of participation in the state, with 91 schools and over 58,000 students receiving free breakfast in the classroom each school day.

Increasing the appropriation amount in the annual budget bill will continue to bolster this key program. Past additions to the bill have proven successful such as the Maryland Meals for Achievement for Teens Act of 2017, which expanded access in middle and high schools and allows a

¹ MSDE. "[Maryland Meals for Achievement.](https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/Programs/MMFA.aspx)"
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one-year grace period for schools that are participating in the program but fall below the 40 percent free and reduced-price meals eligibility threshold.

According to No Kid Hungry, in 2020 473 Maryland schools were eligible for participation in the program but were unable to participate due to the current funding. The lack of funding means that more than 130,000 students across the state are in schools that are unable to implement this program. Based on Montgomery County Public Schools' 2022 free and reduced-price meal (FARMS) rate data, there are 26 schools that have a FARMS rate above 40 percent but are not currently MMFA schools. If these schools were added to MMFA, an additional 28,286 children would be eligible for free in-classroom breakfast. Studies show that students participating in the Maryland Meals for Achievement program have better educational performance, improved health, and decreased disciplinary problems²¹.

School breakfast can have a powerful impact on children facing hunger and the traditional method of offering breakfast before school is often ineffective at capturing all students. Providing in-classroom breakfast has proven to be a success through the Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Class Breakfast Program and supporting this increase in annual appropriations will allow for more eligible schools to be able to provide this service to their students. **For these reasons, the Montgomery County Food Council supports SB0559 and urges a FAVORABLE REPORT for this bill.**

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources

For more information, please contact Massa Cressall, Interim Executive Director, at the email and phone number below.

² No Kid Hungry, "Maryland Meals for Achievement report"
<https://state.nokidhungry.org/maryland/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/11/MMFA-1page-2019.pdf>

