



**MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE**

January 31, 2024

HB 386

**Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program - Alterations
(Maryland Meals for Achievement Flexibility Act of 2024)**

House Ways & Means Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of House Bill 386. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government. We offer this testimony on behalf of the families of more than 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland.

House Bill 386 would expand access for the Maryland Meals for Achievement Program (MMFA), which lends state support to afford schools with greater concentrations of low-income students the ability to provide breakfast to all students, free of charge. This bill would allow elementary schools, if approved, to exercise the same "grab-and-go" method of breakfast distribution as that afforded by high schools.

Several years ago, the state found that only 24% of eligible high schools were benefitting from the program due to the restrictions of the program not allowing for the on-the-go breakfast distribution. Thus, the General Assembly expanded access to the program by empowering high schools to serve breakfasts in any part of the school from "grab and go" carts post-student arrival. The Conference supported that legislation and now supports this legislation to ensure more elementary students avail themselves to the most important meal of the day, one they are all to often not provided at home.

Although Maryland is the wealthiest state in the country, one in eight children in Maryland face constant food insecurity. School breakfast and lunch programs are essential to not only ending hunger, but for improving the health and educational outcomes of students who live with food insecurity. Pope Francis has been very outspoken about the epidemic of food insecurity in our world. He recently stated, "I invite you to make space in your heart for this emergency of respecting the God-given rights of everyone to have access to adequate food. We share what we have in Christian charity with those who face numerous obstacles to satisfy such a basic need." He also invited "all of the institutions of the world, the Church, each of us, as one

single human family, to give a voice to all of those who suffer silently from hunger, so that this voice becomes a roar which can shake the world.” (*Message for The Campaign Against Global Hunger, December, 2013*)

Multiple Maryland Catholic schools serve hundreds of breakfasts every day to their students through the MMFA program, particularly at our predominantly low-income schools. Our school community recognizes the important role that breakfast plays in sustaining students throughout the day and maximizing their learning potential. Nutrition programs such as MMFA assist in Catholic schools’ goal of addressing the needs of the whole child and are an important resource for students whose families are unable to provide them enough to eat.

For all of the reasons stated herein, we support the effort to expand and insure the MMFA program presented through House Bill 386 and we request a favorable report.