

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 696

### Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

*House Ways and Means Committee*

February 14, 2024

Good afternoon Chairman Atterbeary, Sponsor Delegate Palokovich Carr and members of the committee.

The purpose this bill is to provide students at any Maryland school that participates in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program breakfast and lunch at no cost to students or their families.

This Bill will help in the fight against Hunger. Irradicating hunger will aid in improved school performance leading to better concentration, increased academic performance, decreased behavior issues, and healthier students.

In Wicomico County, over 50% of our students qualify for free or reduced priced meals. This gives us the opportunity to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) where we currently offer our meals at no cost to all our students. CEP Eliminates the stigma towards free or reduced priced meals. For some families that don't qualify for free meals, they are forced to choose, providing meals for their students by packing meals from home or purchasing versus putting gas in their car or paying a household bill.

School meal debt is no longer a concern for students and families. Parents no longer get emails or phone calls about their student's debt.

Universal meals are about providing nourishment with dignity. It's about investing in the foundation of learning and ensuring students are ready to learn so that we get the absolute most out of our most valuable resource, our students. It's about providing every student with equal access to the same things; transportation, books, education, and food while they're at school. It's about recognizing school nutrition as an integral part of our educational system. Now is the time to make Universal School Meals permanent for Maryland's future.

As the President Elect of the Maryland School Nutrition Association and the Food Service Director of Wicomico County Public Schools, I stand in support of Universal School Meals.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you in support of House Bill 696.

Every Student!  
Every Meal!  
Every School!