

Del. Vanessa Atterbeary
House Ways and Means Committee
In Support of: HB386

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TESTIMONY in SUPPORT – HB386

Maryland Meals for Achievement – Alterations (Maryland Meals for Achievement Flexibility Act of 2024)

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the Maryland Meals for Achievement Flexibility Act of 2024 (HB386). As Director of the No Kid Hungry Maryland Campaign, I have witnessed the vital role that school breakfast plays in the health, wellbeing, and ultimate success of kids throughout our state. MMFA began in 1998 with just six pilot schools, the Maryland Meals for Achievement program (MMFA) now reaches kids in over 600 schools, located in high-poverty areas, providing Breakfast After the Bell to all students at no cost. MMFA's success has enabled thousands of kids to start their school days with a full belly, ready to learn. By passing HB386, you can provide schools with the added flexibility they need to reach even more kids.

Through the No Kid Hungry Maryland campaign, we have seen the positive impact of MMFA as we work with partners, lawmakers, educators, and businesses to identify and eliminate the barriers that may prevent children and families from accessing healthy and nutritious meals. Approximately 1 in 8 children in Maryland could face hunger this year, and programs like MMFA, which increase access to school breakfast play a critical role in reducing food insecurity for children and families.

The changes outlined in HB386 are budget neutral and would make the MMFA program more flexible to meet the specific needs of each school instead of a one size fits all method on elementary schools. This change is in line with what currently exists in middle and high schools.

The bill allows schools to implement an in-classroom or Grab and Go model, both of which allow students the opportunity to consume meals in the classroom after the bell.

Research shows that when kids start the day hungry, it is harder to focus in class. Test scores are lower, and students are more likely to miss class time because they are in the nurse's office with headaches or stomach aches. For these kids, school breakfast is critical. The traditional method of serving the meal before the school day starts, however, can be ineffective. As a result, only a fraction of the students who may need this meal are able to access it.

On behalf of No Kid Hungry Maryland and families across our state, I encourage you to support HB386 so that more students can start the school day ready to learn.