



### **INFORMATIONAL TESTIMONY FOR HOUSE BILL 386**

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

*Ways and Means Committee*

January 31, 2024

HB 386 aims to provide additional flexibilities to schools participating in the Maryland Meals for Achievement Program by allowing participating elementary schools the opportunity to serve breakfast after the bell in any broadly accessible part of the school.

Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) is a longstanding state-funded program that allows schools with 40 percent or higher free and reduced-price meal enrollment to serve school breakfast at no cost to all of their students in the classroom or through another after the bell model, such as “grab and go” or second chance breakfast.

The National School Breakfast Program is a critical tool in combatting childhood hunger. Decades of research show that children who participate in school breakfast are less likely to experience food insecurity, demonstrate improved academic performance, consume a healthier overall diet, and are less likely to be late to or absent from school.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these important benefits, the School Breakfast Program fails to reach many of the low-income students who need it most. During the 2019-2020 school year, only 62.1 low-income Maryland students participated in the School Breakfast Program for every 100 low-income students who participated in the National School Lunch Program.<sup>2</sup>

This is because in many schools, school breakfast is served in the cafeteria before the school day begins. As a result, students miss out on school breakfast due to transportation issues like incompatible bus or family schedules. In addition to the timing of meal service, the cost of the meal and stigma associated with the program also often prevent students from participating.

Since its creation in 1998, MMFA has succeeded in increasing access to and participation in the School Breakfast Program by targeting and removing these main barriers. By providing state funds to allow schools to serve breakfast to all students at no cost, MMFA removes the barrier of cost and eliminates stigma by making the program available to all students regardless of economic status. Additionally, requirements around implementing breakfast in the classroom or an alternative breakfast after the bell service model ensure breakfast is more accessible and integrated into the school day.

For these reasons, Maryland Hunger Solutions appreciates the opportunity to inform the conversation around HB 386. We welcome the opportunity to work with legislators, the Maryland State Department of Education, and local school districts to encourage best practices in expanding access and participation in the school breakfast program.

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<sup>1</sup> Food Research and Action Center, Breakfast for Learning (Available at <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>) and Breakfast for Health (Available at <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforhealth-1.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Hunger Solutions, 2020 Maryland School Breakfast Report (Available at <https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/MDHS-Breakfast-Report-2021.pdf>).