



HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 14, 2024

HOUSE BILL 696

**PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION – BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PROGRAMS – UNIVERSAL
EXPANSION**

TESTIMONY OF AVI LENCZ

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, AGUDATH ISRAEL OF MARYLAND

SUPPORT

Agudath Israel of Maryland speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland, and on behalf of the 10,000 students attending 30 Jewish day schools in our great state. Many of our schools participate in the National School Lunch Program and/or the School Breakfast Program.

Food insecurity has become increasingly salient in discussions regarding improving the lot of vulnerable Marylanders. Food insecurity affects the entire family, but has a particularly negative effect on children and young adults. Without proper sustenance, students are more likely to struggle and suffer emotionally, academically, and physically. Repeated studies show that school food programs for students can lead to improved outcomes in many areas of life. Additionally, such programs can lift some of the economic burden that weighs down on parents struggling to make ends meet.

This bill would improve student health and help boost their academic outcomes. It would help educators and faculty by creating a healthy classroom environment. And it would help struggling parents by letting them know their children can receive the sustenance they need to succeed.

Universal expansion of the meals programs means that all Maryland students will be able to eat properly. We respectfully request the committee members to take an important step in guiding our state to a more equitable future by helping all Maryland students, and ask for a favorable report on House Bill 696.