



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

February 14, 2024

TO: The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbary
Chair, Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Marc Elrich
County Executive

RE: House Bill 696, *Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion*
Support

I am writing to express my support for House Bill 696, *Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion*, which requires that the State provide funding to supplement federal aid to cover the cost of providing free meals to all students in schools that participate in the National School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs. Those programs provide federal funding to reimburse school systems for the cost of serving free or reduced-price meals to eligible low-income students. Under the bill, all students would receive free meals in any school that receives federal reimbursement for free or reduced-price meals.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought increased attention to the unacceptably high number of Maryland families that struggle with food insecurity; a number which has remained alarmingly elevated over the past three years. As hundreds of thousands of Maryland children and families continue down the long road to recovery from the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, there has never been a more important time to make significant investments in the school meal programs.

Extensive research has shown that access to healthy meals improves students' educational experiences, academic achievement, and social and emotional wellbeing. By providing school meals at no cost to all students, Maryland would be supporting equity in the classroom and making sure every child has the nutrition they need in order to excel. These meals are just as important to students' academic success as textbooks or transportation and should be treated as a critical component of education. When students are distracted by hunger because they were unable to participate in school breakfast or lunch, they miss out on the chance to learn and benefit from the important opportunities offered by Maryland's education system.

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary

Re: House Bill 696

February 14, 2024

Hungry kids can't learn. Requiring the State to provide supplemental funding to ensure that every child has access to a nutritious school breakfast and lunch every day is a smart and effective investment in Maryland's communities and future.

I respectfully request that the House Ways and Means Committee give this bill a favorable report.

cc: Members of the Ways and Means Committee