

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.

My name is Mary Klatko. I am the State Legislative Co-Chair of the Maryland School Nutrition Association. I am writing today to express my strong support for HB 696 and that of our entire organization, Maryland School Nutrition Association comprised of all persons working in the School Food and Nutrition Service Programs.

The purpose of this bill is to serve all students a healthy, nutritious breakfast and lunch each day at no cost to them as part of their school day experience.

This program is needed for many reasons but the one closest to the school system's mission is support for the student's education. The Maryland Legislature has shown strong support for the Blueprint for Education. The Universal Free Breakfast and Lunch Program is the best support for students in their educational experience by helping them get ready to learn because "A Hungry Child Cannot learn!"

We found during Covid that when we feed all students both meals at no cost to them that many good things happened in the school environment such as a significant reduction in discipline referrals according to a study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the US Census Bureau.

Current Research Reviews have found that Universal Free School Meals are associated with: Better attendance; Less tardiness; More ability to focus on and participate in classes; Improved test scores and Improved diet quality.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and express the strong support of the Maryland School Nutrition Association for HB 696.