



Young Democrats of Maryland

HB696 Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion
Ways and Means Committee
Wednesday, February 14, 2024
SUPPORT

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in favor of HB 696. The **Young Democrats of Maryland** (YDM) represent the next generation of Marylanders and seek to advance policies which allow Maryland youth to thrive. This bill represents one of our top priorities; allocating state funds to ensure every Maryland student that attends a public school enrolled in the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Program is offered a meal at no-cost.

YDM is deeply committed to ensuring equitable access to the tools necessary for Maryland's students to achieve academic success. Because of the amount of time a student spends at school, their school environment plays a significant role in their diet and overall health.¹ School meals, just like a class textbook or bus-ride to class, are essential for a student to maximize their potential in the classroom. Numerous studies have detailed a direct correlation between school-provided meals and academic performance in a variety of metrics.^{2 3 4} It is clear from the evidence base that student hunger is an obstacle towards educational equity.

During the pandemic, expanded access to school meals served as a lifeline for families during that difficult time. With the expiration of federal resources, too many children now miss out on school meals because the eligibility criteria leaves out struggling families. By ensuring all students within qualifying schools are offered a meal, the bill reduces pressure on family budgets when the cost of living is rising. By providing equitable access to these meals, HB 696 ensures that no child misses out on these tangible benefits. The bill aligns with the Moore Miller Administration's vision to end child poverty, and we hope it will be a priority for the General Assembly as well.

For these reasons, we respectfully request your support for HB 696 and urge a favorable committee report.

Melissa Bender
YDM Vice President for Political Affairs
Chair, YDM Legislative and Policy Committee

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YDM Legislative and Policy Committee

¹Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33799780/>.

²Effects of Breakfast Timing on Cognitive Functions of Elementary School Students. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8859144/>.

³Breakfast intake and composition is associated with superior academic achievement in elementary schoolchildren. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26697955/>.

⁴Nutrition and cognitive achievement: an evaluation of the School Breakfast Program. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272714002497>.