



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair
Ways and Means Committee Members
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus
DATE: 2/28/24
RE: HB696 - Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion

The MLLC supports HB696 - Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion, 2024

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB696.

School meals often serve as the first line of defense against childhood hunger across the nation.¹ One in eight children in Maryland face hunger on a daily basis, which adds up to more than 164,000 children across the state.² According to data from the Maryland Center on Economic Policy, the number and percent of students receiving free and reduced meals at school in Maryland has increased from 36% in 2009 to 43% in 2018.³

Access to school meals is particularly important for Latino students. Latinos are more likely to live in food swaps and therefore more likely to face food insecurity and consume unhealthy food.⁴ Food insecurity can have serious health impacts including a higher risk of developing conditions like diabetes or asthma.⁵

In 2018, over 60,000 Maryland middle and high school students were surveyed with questions pertaining to food insecurity. The survey revealed that over 33% of Hispanic/Latino middle school students faced food insecurity, compared to 25% of all students in the state.⁶ Similarly, Hispanic/Latino high school students also faced food insecurity at a higher rate of 37.9% compared to all students across the state (28%).

HB696 will alter the standards of the State Free Feeding Program, beginning in Fiscal Year 2026, to acquire that if a school participates in a certain federal nutritional program, then each student in the school must be offered a meal that meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrition

¹ [Making the Case for Healthy School Meals for All in Maryland](#)

² [What Hunger Looks Like in Maryland](#)

³ [STUDENTS RECEIVING FREE AND REDUCED SCHOOL MEALS IN MARYLAND](#)

⁴ [How Universal Free School Meals Can Help Latino Kids](#)

⁵ [FOOD INSECURITY AMONG MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MARYLAND](#)

⁶ Ibid.

standards at no cost to the student. The bill establishes that the State be responsible for reimbursing a county board or a participating nonpublic school for the student share of the costs of:

- Breakfast provided to all students eligible for a reduced price breakfast according to the following schedule:
 - For fiscal year 2022 and each fiscal year thereafter, the greater of 30 cents per student or the required federal per meal charge to students; and
- Lunches provided to all students eligible for a reduced price lunch according to the following schedule:
 - For fiscal year 2023 and each fiscal year thereafter, the greater of 40 cents per student or the required federal per meal charge to students.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB696.