

HB 1254
Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment
House Appropriations Committee
March 5, 2025

SUPPORT

House Bill 1254 creates the Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program in the Maryland State Department of Education. The bill funds the program at \$10 million, which would be paid by the state to schools that participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of the National School Lunch Program.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders are at risk of food insecurity. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, including families with children and communities of color. The causes of food insecurity are complex and often include additional factors such as low income, lack of reliable transportation, and missing community resources such as grocery stores.

The economic stability of a child's family should not dictate whether they are able to eat nutritious food every day, yet for too many Marylanders this is the reality. 35.1% of Maryland families making less than \$35,000 a year are considered food insufficient. However, it is not just families in the lowest income bracket who are struggling. 1 in 3 Marylanders are finding it difficult to afford their basic household necessities – including food, and more alarming is that 31.8% of Maryland families report that their children are not eating enough because food is unaffordable.¹

The Maryland Food Bank sees firsthand the absolute beneficial impact of meals that are served while children are at schools or other safe community centers through our Supper Club, which served over 480,000 meals at 57 sites to children after school in FY 24, and our Summer Club, which served over 72,000 meals at 40 sites to children during the summer of 2024. Further, we operate food pantries at 185 K-12 schools across the state, where in FY 24 we distributed the equivalent of over 2.4 million meals serving approximately 48,000 Maryland families. The sheer magnitude of need is present in these programs, and the Maryland Food Bank knows that our efforts, while substantial, cannot alone solve child food insecurity in the state, as a crucial time of day for children to eat is missing – namely, breakfasts and lunches.

The Maryland Food Bank appreciates your consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 1254.

¹ MFB Analysis of U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey data, Table 2: "Food Sufficiency for Households with and without children, in the Last 7 Days, by Select Characteristics." 2024.