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03/03/2025

The Honorable Members of the House Committee

Maryland General Assembly, Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1254 (HB1254) - Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program - Establishment

Hearing Date: March 05, 2025

Chairperson and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Maureen Wambui, and I am a proud Immigrant, Parent, Community advocate and resident of Legislative District 8 in Maryland. I am submitting testimony in **strong support** of House Bill 1254, the "Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program - Establishment." This bill is a vital step toward ensuring that all Maryland students have access to nutritious meals, regardless of their economic background.

Why HB1254 is Essential:

Expanding Access to Free School Meals

Currently, many students in low-income communities struggle with food insecurity, which directly impacts their ability to focus, learn, and succeed academically. HB1254 helps schools implement the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), allowing them to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students without the need for household income applications.

- Schools in lower-income districts will no longer have to process individual applications, reducing administrative burdens and ensuring that no child goes hungry due to paperwork barriers.
- Universal meal access eliminates stigma for students who rely on free or reduced-price meals, fostering a more inclusive school environment.

Improving Educational Outcomes

Research shows that students who have access to regular, nutritious meals perform better in school:

- Higher test scores and improved concentration
- Lower absenteeism rates

- Reduced behavioral issues in classrooms

By ensuring that all eligible schools receive financial support for meal programs, HB1254 helps create a more equitable learning environment for Maryland's children.

Financial Relief for Families

For many working-class families, food costs are a significant burden. By expanding CEP eligibility, HB1254 provides direct financial relief to struggling households, ensuring that parents do not have to worry about affording their child's school meals.

- This is especially beneficial for minority families, who often face barriers in accessing assistance programs.
- Families will save money each month, allowing them to allocate resources to housing, healthcare, and other essential needs.

Supporting Schools and Local Economies

This bill also benefits schools by:

- Providing additional state funding to ensure CEP implementation is financially sustainable.
- Reducing administrative costs, allowing schools to redirect funds to educational programs, teachers, and student resources.
- Supporting local food suppliers, as increased meal participation boosts demand for fresh and locally sourced ingredients.

HB1254 is a student-centered policy that will have long-lasting positive effects on Maryland's children, families, and schools. By expanding CEP participation, this bill will reduce food insecurity, improve student success, and support educational equity across the state. I urge the committee to vote in favor of HB1254 and help make sure no child goes hungry in Maryland schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Wambui