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of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,
Appropriations Committee
March 5, 2025**

HB1254: FAVORABLE

Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment** as means to further impact food insecurity for Maryland's most vulnerable students.

HB1254 establishes a Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program to be administered by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The bill requires the State to pay the difference between the applicable federal paid reimbursement rate and the free reimbursement rate as set annually by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. Funding would be for eligible schools that participate in the Federal Community Eligibility Provision of the Child Nutrition Programs (CEP). This funding must complement and not replace federal funds. MSDE would develop a process for county boards to participate in the state-level program and ensure funding is distributed based on the concentration of poverty in public schools within the jurisdiction as well as geographic diversity in determining funding prioritization. By July 1, 2026, and annually, MSDE must report on the status of the program to the General Assembly.

CEP is a meal service option that allows schools and school districts in low-income areas to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to enrolled students, without collecting household income applications. School districts with an Identified Student Percentage (ISP) of 40% or higher are eligible to elect CEP. Identified students are those students who are directly certified for free meals based on their participation in other programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

The Howard County Public School System's (HCPSS) Food and Nutrition Services staff takes their role in the development of the whole child very seriously, meeting the crucial task of providing for the nutritional needs of our students. Students require healthy, nutritious meals on a daily basis in order to function effectively. In HCPSS, 11 schools currently participate in the Federal CEP. Under HB1254 those schools would be eligible to receive additional funds from the State to cover costs of meals not already covered by the Federal government. Staff estimates this would allocate an additional \$547,959 annually that can be used to enhance meal services and address outstanding meal debt.

For these reasons, we urge a FAVORABLE report on HB1254 from this Committee.