



February 26, 2025

HB 1254

Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment

House Appropriations Committee

Position: FAVORABLE w/ Amendment

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of House Bill 1254, with amendment. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government. We also offer this testimony on behalf of the families of approximately 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland, as well as the one in every eight Maryland students educated in a nonpublic school, particularly those whose schools participate in the Federal School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program.

House Bill 1254 would allow schools participating in the Federal School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program to feed all students a free breakfast or lunch, respectively. The bill would allow the State to subsidize the cost of the free meals not provided through federal funding for both programs. Participating schools would not be authorized to charge any student for meals under either program. **As this bill does require nonpublic schools to maximize the use of available state and federal funds to carry out the program, we respectfully request a clarifying amendment that adds “AND PARTICIPATING NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS” after “PUBLIC SCHOOLS” on page 2, line 12, akin to last year’s bill (SB 579).**

Although Maryland is the wealthiest state in the country, one in eight households in Maryland face constant food insecurity. Sadly, children and adolescents are not exempt from that statistic. School breakfast and lunch programs are essential to not only ending hunger, but for improving the health and educational outcomes of students who live with food insecurity.

Our nonpublic schools that serve low-income students often operate on very tight budgets. Thus, some that would like to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision Program cannot, due to an inability to afford the cost gap in their school budgets that it would entail. This legislation might allow more schools to participate in that program and, thus, more kids to be fed, alleviating the burden on parents. Well over 100,000 meals are currently served annually to low-income students in nonpublic schools through these federal programs. This bill purports to ensure that all students in the State of Maryland whose schools participate in the free feeding programs are provided completely free breakfast and lunch, regardless of federal funding limitations. It is for these reasons that the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report for House Bill 1254.