



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

Lowe House Office Building, 6 Bladen Street, Room 200 · Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Phone 410-841-3374 | 301-858-3374 · 800-492-7122 Ext. 3374 · Fax 410-841-3342 | 301-858-3342
latino.caucus@house.state.md.us · www.mdlatinocaucus.org

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TO: Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair
Delegate Mark S. Chang, Vice Chair
Economic Matters Committee Members
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus
DATE: March 5, 2025
RE: HB1254 – Community Eligibility Provision Expansion
Program – Establishment

The MLLC supports HB1254 – Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment

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 HB1254.

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

The following bill establishes the Community Eligibility Expansion Program in the State Department of Education to provide funding to eligible schools that participate in the federal community eligibility provision of the child nutrition programs. Through this program, the State can provide free meals for the communities that need it most.

Access to school meals is particularly important for Latino students. Latinos are more likely to live in food swamps and therefore more likely to face food insecurity and consume unhealthy food.⁴ 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.⁵ 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%). Food insecurity can have serious health impacts including a higher risk of developing conditions like diabetes or asthma.⁶

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

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 Ibid

⁶ [Food Insecurity Among Middle & High School Students in Maryland](#)

HB1254.