



4900 Puerto Rico Avenue NE
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capitalareafoodbank.org

March 5, 2025

Dear Chairman Barnes and Members of the Committee:

The Capital Area Food Bank urges your support for HB1254 Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment. This bill would establish \$10 million in state funding to support the implementation of Community Eligibility (CEP) statewide. It would fill the gap between the current federal reimbursement formula and a 100% free meal reimbursement for schools and districts eligible to serve school meals at no cost to all of their students through CEP.

My name is Joseph Liu and I am the Director of Advocacy and Public Policy at the Capital Area Food Bank. The Capital Area Food Bank is the anchor of the hunger relief infrastructure in the National Capital Region, providing more than 60 million meals to people in communities across Prince George's and Montgomery County, Maryland, as well as in the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia. We work with a network of nearly 200 other community-based organizations in Maryland to put food resources in the hands of our neighbors in need.

Our programs reach neighbors in a variety of ways, from markets at local schools and churches to senior brown bag programs to our curbside grocery truck. We seek to provide good food today to ensure brighter futures tomorrow.

We know first-hand about the reality of food insecurity among school children because we see their faces every day when we deliver after-school and summer meals. Since these meals are only served during out-of-school time, we know the need is even greater for meals that meet kids where they are during school hours

We know that good food today will help make brighter futures for Maryland's children tomorrow. Despite our efforts, there are still 61,000 children in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties who are food insecure, according to our latest Hunger Report survey. In Prince George's, 16% of children or 34,000 lack food security. Montgomery County is home to 27,000 food insecure children or 11% of children in the county. While this number is already high, we know it would be higher were it not for parents and caregivers sacrificing their own food to ensure their children did not go hungry. That is why it is so important to do everything we can to make important steps towards universal school meals.

Good food today. Brighter futures tomorrow.



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One way we know we can increase food security for children and reduce the burden on caregivers and parents by making meals more accessible at school. Free school lunch and breakfast saves individual families about \$1200 a year per child. That's \$1200 to help soften the crushing blow of rising grocery prices. For some parents, \$1200 makes sure their children have the clothes and school supplies they need. And for some children, that \$1200 may keep the lights on at home or even keep them in that home.

This extra help for families is even more vital as thousands of workers in our area are facing extreme uncertainty at the federal level. Our regional economy is 40% dependent either on direct federal employment or procurement spending. Whether a parent is a federal worker facing reductions-in-force or a contractor experiencing stop-work orders or a small business owner whose daytime customers have been laid off, the insecurity is felt all the way down to the smallest and most vulnerable.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Good food today. Brighter futures tomorrow.