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**Testimony of Elisabeth Davis, MD  
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**HB 1254: Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment  
Position: FAVORABLE  
March 5, 2025  
House Appropriations Committee**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of House Bill 1254. My name is Elisabeth Davis, and I am a pediatric resident at Children's National Hospital and a constituent from Montgomery County. I am submitting testimony on behalf of myself, fellow pediatrician Danielle Dooley, MD, MPhil, and my institution. Children's National has been serving the nation's children since 1870. Nearly 60% of our patients are residents of Maryland, and we maintain a network of community-based pediatric practices, surgery centers and regional outpatient centers in Maryland.

Every day in my role at Children's National, I meet Maryland children and their families. When they sit down in my office, we talk about a wide range of topics – what medical conditions they have, what vaccines can keep them healthy, and what activities keep them active. We also talk about what they eat daily, how they do in school, and their dreams for the future.

Discussions about nutrition are familiar to every pediatrician. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only one in four Maryland children ate fruit daily in the past week, and less than half ate a daily vegetable. These sobering statistics are even more striking in families with food insecurity.<sup>2</sup> In our practice, we screen every family for food insecurity, and nearly 40% of our families screen positive.

One of the most important things I can do to protect the health of my patients is to ensure that they are eating well-balanced, nutritious diets that help reduce the risk of chronic medical conditions and stimulate brain development.<sup>3</sup> When I ask parents and caregivers to identify barriers to healthy eating, nearly every single person says it's the cost.

The historic increase in food prices<sup>4</sup> we have all experienced hurts families, especially those who already struggle with food insecurity. Data so far has suggested that the community

eligibility provision program can play a role in reducing obesity, increasing school attendance, and improving behavior and school performance.<sup>5</sup> For pediatricians, those outcomes make perfect sense. But there is still work to be done in ensuring Maryland school districts serving large numbers of low-income students can afford to provide nutritious breakfasts and lunches to all students free of charge.

House Bill 1254 would help fill that gap. By establishing a Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program, it would provide additional funding to participating schools. By focusing the funding on schools who serve students at the highest risk of food insecurity, Maryland would be taking a step towards ensuring all its children are well-fed and well-nourished.

One of the greatest gifts of my work as a pediatrician is hearing my patients' success stories. I know that with the passage of House Bill 1254, I will hear even more—children growing up healthy, strong, and excelling in school. I applaud the Maryland General Assembly for introducing this important legislation, which will have life-long benefits for our state's youngest residents and their families and respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 1254. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

**For more information, please contact:**

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  2. Nutrition and Food Insecurity. aap.org. Updated on August 8, 2022. Accessed on February 17, 2025. [https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood/early-childhood-health-and-development/nutrition-and-food-insecurity/?srsltid=AfmBOopuQTAm1O7YkGRFJoV906IPiJ0v8l8KRxK\\_9Vd1Ro55HqGm92t](https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood/early-childhood-health-and-development/nutrition-and-food-insecurity/?srsltid=AfmBOopuQTAm1O7YkGRFJoV906IPiJ0v8l8KRxK_9Vd1Ro55HqGm92t)
  3. Food Price Outlook - Summary Findings. usda.gov. Updated on January 24, 2025. Accessed on February 17, 2025. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings>
  4. Hecht AA, Pollack Porter KM, Turner L. Impact of The Community Eligibility Provision of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act on Student Nutrition, Behavior, and Academic Outcomes: 2011–2019. Am J Public Health 2020; 110(9): 1405–1410. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305743>