

## **FIXED MAP Support for SB 769 - Community Eligibili**

Uploaded by: Abby Snyder, Co-Chair

Position: FAV



## Member Agencies:

211 Maryland  
Baltimore Jewish Council  
Behavioral Health System Baltimore  
CASH Campaign of Maryland  
Energy Advocates  
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland  
Family League of Baltimore  
Fuel Fund of Maryland  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
of Greater Washington  
Job Opportunities Task Force  
Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services,  
Inc.  
League of Women Voters of Maryland  
Loyola University Maryland  
Maryland Center on Economic Policy  
Maryland Community Action  
Partnership  
Maryland Family Network  
Maryland Food Bank  
Maryland Hunger Solutions  
Paul's Place  
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore  
Welfare Advocates

## Marylanders Against Poverty

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## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 769

### Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment

*Senate Budget & Taxation Committee*  
*Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee*  
February 26, 2025

**Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports SB 769**, which aims to establish state funding to support schools and school districts that offer school meals at no cost to all of their students through the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Studies have long shown that school meals reduce childhood hunger, decrease rates of childhood obesity, improve nutrition and wellness, enhance development and school readiness, and support learning, attendance, and behavior.<sup>1</sup> Recent studies reaffirm that access to nutritious meals in school increases long-term health and educational outcomes for children by establishing healthy eating habits early on.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these proven benefits, the current tiered payment system allows too many children to fall through the cracks. While school meals remain one of the federal government's most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children, the low eligibility threshold excludes many families who struggle to meet their most basic needs from receiving any assistance. For example, a family of four living on just \$57,000 per year is ineligible for the free or reduced-price school meal program. With inflation levels and grocery prices at a historic high on top of Maryland's already high cost of living, many Maryland families living above this threshold still struggle financially and are unable to make school meal payments, leading to burdensome school meal debt. Additional obstacles such as language barriers, misinformation, and stigma prevent many eligible families from applying for assistance.

CEP eliminates many of these barriers by providing breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost without the need for meal applications. CEP has proven successful in addressing food insecurity, eliminating unpaid meal fees, and reducing the administrative burden of the program. Unfortunately, the current federal reimbursement formula for CEP schools is often inadequate to cover the full cost of operating a universal meals program, leaving many schools at the lower end of the eligibility spectrum unable to participate due to a lack of financial sustainability.

SB 769 aims to address this barrier to CEP implementation by providing state funding to supplement the insufficient federal reimbursements. Making this investment in CEP schools is an important step towards ensuring that students in CEP eligible schools have access to the healthy meals they need to grow and thrive in the classroom and beyond – advancing equity, ending stigma, and investing in Maryland's future.

**MAP appreciates your consideration and requests the committee provide a favorable report on SB 769.**

<sup>1</sup> Food Research & Action Center (2016). Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning. Available at <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Food Research & Action Center (2021). School Meals are Essential Health and Learning. Available at <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning.pdf>

**Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.**

# **Testimony IN FAVOR SB769 - Feb262025.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ayesha Holmes

Position: FAV

Chairman Guzzone  
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee  
Testimony: FAVORABLE

Ayesha B. Holmes  
No Kid Hungry, MD  
aholmes@strength.org

**Testimony IN FAVOR of SB769  
Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Expansion Program**

Dear Chair Guzzone and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ayesha Holmes, and I am the Director of No Kid Hungry Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the impact of SB 769, to establish the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Expansion Program to provide funding for eligible schools that participate in the federal community eligibility provision of child nutrition programs.

No Kid Hungry Maryland is a campaign of the national anti-hunger organization Share Our Strength. Since 2008, Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Maryland campaign has worked with partners, schools, and advocates to end childhood hunger throughout the state. No Kid Hungry Maryland leads the Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland.

CEP positively benefits both students and schools. When children have consistent access to nutritious meals, they are more focused in class, attend school more regularly, and have fewer disciplinary issues. For families struggling to stretch their food budgets, CEP ensures that their children receive two healthy meals each day, alleviating financial stress at home. By eliminating out-of-pocket costs and reducing stigma, CEP promotes equity, ensuring every child has the nutrition they need to succeed.

Additionally, CEP eliminates administrative burdens like meal applications, fee-based counting, and claiming and unpaid meal charges. With simplified meal service, school nutrition teams can focus on delivering high-quality meals and implementing innovative models like breakfast in the classroom. These efficiencies often result in increased meal participation, financial stability, and even revenue generation for school nutrition budgets. *In short, CEP doesn't just feed kids, it strengthens schools.*

We support efforts to encourage CEP participation, but improvements are needed to ensure funding is allocated fairly and effectively. We recommend a few key adjustments to ensure this program serves the students intended.

- **Clarify the Use of "Concentration of Poverty":** If this term aligns with the definition in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, it should be explicitly stated.
- **Ensure Funding Prioritization is Clear and Fair:** The legislation states that funding must be distributed "based on the concentration of poverty," we recommend the language be revised to: *"distributed to public schools under the jurisdiction of the county board with the highest concentration of poverty that do not already receive the federal free reimbursement rate for all meals."*
- **Address Geographic Diversity Concerns:** Clear criteria are necessary to ensure fair and equitable access to incentives.
- **Define Eligibility for Public vs. Non-Public Schools:** The bill is inconsistent, Sec. E (1-2) refers to public schools, but Sec. G includes non-public schools. This must be clarified to prevent misinterpretation and ensure accountability.
- **Set a Clear Deadline for Schools:** Schools must know whether they qualify for state funds *before* the CEP election deadline (June 30th). A firm deadline must be established to allow informed decision-making.

On behalf of No Kid Hungry Maryland, I urge you to support and strengthen SB 798 to create a more equitable and effective school meal program for our state's children.

# **SB769 meals for students.pdf**

Uploaded by: Beth Jarrett

Position: FAV

**Testimony in Support of HB 769 – Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program -  
Establishment**

*Senate Budget & Taxation Committee*

*Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee*

February 26, 2025

**FAVORABLE**

Free State PTA (FSPTA) represents over 70,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. As the state's premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities, and a strong advocate for public education. ***We are offering a favorable testimony in support of Senate Bill 769.***

Too many children miss out on the benefits of school meals because of the current tiered payment structure, which requires a family of four to earn less than \$57,000 annually to qualify for no-cost meals. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a proven solution to this issue. Research has shown that CEP schools experience a range of benefits, including increased meal participation, reduced stigma for students, elimination of school meal debt, and improved staff morale. Additionally, students in CEP schools are approximately three times less likely to experience food insecurity compared to those in eligible schools that do not participate. Despite these benefits, not all schools are able to use CEP because of limitations in the current federal reimbursement structure. Establishing a state CEP supplement would help make the program financially sustainable for more schools. ***This \$10 million per year investment from the state could help up to 200 additional schools opt into CEP and offer breakfast and lunch to the over 90,000 students attending those schools.***

This legislation is an essential investment for the health and academic success of Maryland students. Supporting this bill would be supporting equity in the classroom and making sure every child has the nourishment they need to excel. These meals are important to students' academic success just as textbooks or transportation are and should be treated as a critical component to education. When students are distracted by hunger because they are unable to afford school breakfast or lunch, they miss out on the chance to learn and benefit from the important opportunities offered by Maryland's education system. Hungry kids can't learn. Ensuring that every child in the state has access to a nutritious school breakfast and lunch every day is a critical and effective investment in Maryland's communities and future. Free State PTA urges the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 769.

Testimony is presented on behalf of

Gerrod Tyler, President

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<https://www.fspta.org/>

# **cotsonas support sb0769.pdf**

Uploaded by: Cherie Cotsonas

Position: FAV



**Testimony to Maryland Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**

**Hearing Title: Community Eligibility Provision Bill SB769**

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**

February 25, 2025

Dear Senator Guzzone and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB769 Community Eligibility Provision. I am Cherie Cotsonas, President-Elect Maryland School Nutrition Association. For over 20 years I have worked in school nutrition, and I have personally watched the strain grow on the School Nutrition Program in my county and of my colleague's nutrition programs across the state of Maryland. Each year we have families send their students to school with no means to pay for their meals. The fact that a child has no funds to pay for a meal does not remove the hunger they are feeling in the pit of their stomach when they arrive at school at 7:00 am or at 11:00 am when they go to lunch.

In St. Mary's County we have had an increase in the student meal account debt over the past few years. Our current debt is over \$95,000 and climbing. We expanded our ability to offer free breakfast through the Maryland Meals for Achievement program at 11 schools. Over the past two years our department has enrolled four of our eligible elementary schools in CEP. The CEP school parents, teachers, and administrators see the advantage of students receiving free breakfast and lunch through the CEP program. The schools participating in this program see a decreased anxiety among students during breakfast and lunch because the students have free access to meals. Teachers report students are more attentive when they can take advantage of free breakfast and lunch at their schools.

I encourage you to continue providing funding to eligible schools that participate in the Community Eligibility Provision. This bill is essential to address the highest needs that our children in Maryland need to have met each day.

The students of today are our future of tomorrow's Maryland.

By providing funding we can continue the programs that are reaching our most vulnerable population, stop at least four of the schools from increasing school nutrition program debt, and support the growth of a healthier generation.

Thank you for considering my testimony regarding SB769. Your support is vital to the wellbeing of our students in Maryland public schools.

Sincerely,  
Cherie Cotsonas  
President Elect, Maryland School Nutrition Association



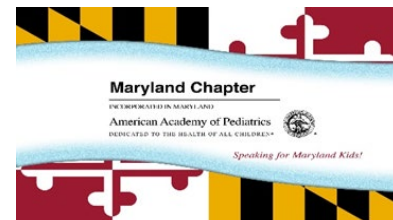
# **SB0769\_FAV\_MedChi, MDAAP\_Community Eligibility Pro**

Uploaded by: Christine Krone

Position: FAV



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Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

February 26, 2025

Senate Bill 769 – *Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment*

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

On behalf of The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), and the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP), we submit this letter of support for Senate Bill 769. This bill establishes the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Expansion Program within the Maryland State Department of Education. It provides state funding to eligible schools participating in the federal CEP under child nutrition programs. Specifically, the state will cover the difference between the federal paid reimbursement rate and the free reimbursement rate, ensuring full funding for school meals. Starting in Fiscal Year 2027, the Governor must allocate \$10 million annually to support the program.

The CEP is a vital federal initiative that allows schools in low-income areas to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students, eliminating the need for income-based applications. As physicians and advocates for child health, MedChi and MDAAP strongly support the expansion of CEP in Maryland schools. Proper nutrition is fundamental to children's physical health, cognitive development, and overall well-being, and the CEP is a critical tool in ensuring equitable access to nutritious meals.

Research has consistently shown that school meal programs play a crucial role in combatting food insecurity, improving diet quality, and reducing childhood obesity. Reliable access to balanced meals supports healthy growth and development, enhances immune function, and decreases the risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and hypertension.

The CEP significantly enhances child nutrition and health by ensuring all students have access to essential nutrients necessary for their growth and well-being. Participation in school meal programs has been linked to healthier body weights and a lower risk of obesity-related conditions. Additionally, consistent access to nutritious meals supports cognitive function, reducing difficulties in concentration and improving academic performance. Proper nutrition also plays a crucial role in mental health by alleviating stress, anxiety, and behavioral issues linked to food insecurity. Beyond academic benefits, CEP helps lower the prevalence of diet-related illnesses, reducing long-term healthcare costs for families and the state. Eliminating income verification barriers increases participation and removes stigma, ensuring all children receive the nutrition they need without administrative or social obstacles.

Ensuring that all children receive adequate nutrition is not just an educational issue – it is a critical public health priority. By investing in school meal programs, we invest in healthier children, stronger academic outcomes, and a more equitable future for all Maryland students. No child should have to worry about where their next meal will come from, especially in a school setting designed to foster growth and learning. Implementing CEP broadly will help ensure that every student has access to the nutrition they need to thrive. For these reasons, MedChi and MDAAP urge a favorable report.

**For more information call:**

Christine K. Krone  
J. Steven Wise  
Danna L. Kauffman  
Andrew G. Vetter  
410-244-7000

# **SB769 - Community Eligibility Provision Expansion**

Uploaded by: Dawana Sterrette

Position: FAV

**The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners  
Supports Sente Bill 769  
Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment**

**February 26, 2025**

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners supports Sente Bill 769 because it would provide funding to eligible schools that participate in the federal community eligibility provision of the child nutrition programs. This bill is an outgrowth of the report that the Maryland State Department of Education provided to the Maryland General Assembly on a cost estimate for providing free breakfast and lunch to all students in public schools in the State.

In Baltimore City, the Board is serving all free breakfast and lunch to all students under the CEP program. Through FY27, 100% of our meals are currently reimbursed at the “free” reimbursement rate. The Board chose to enter into the CEP program because of the nature of our student body. All students should be able to eat, regardless of zip code. The fact that the State would pay the difference between the applicable federal paid reimbursement rate and the federal free reimbursement rate would benefit school districts such as the City, if we should ever fall below 100% of our student body at the free rate.

For the foregoing reasons, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners supports Sente Bill 769 and urges a FAVORABLE report.

Dawana Merritt Sterrette, Esq.  
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# **Testimony SB 769 CEP Leach.pdf**

Uploaded by: Elizabeth Leach

Position: FAV

**Testimony in Support of SN 769**

**Primary and Secondary Education- Community Eligibility Provision-  
Hunger Free School Meals**

**Senate Budget and Taxation and Education, Energy and the Environment**

**February 25, 2025**

Greetings Senator Guzzone and Budget and Taxation Committee Members

My Name is Elizabeth Leach and I am Director of Food & Nutrition Services for Montgomery County Public Schools. This testimony is provided in my personal capacity and not on behalf of the school system.

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 769.

The purpose of this Bill is to provide state funding to cover the cost equal to the difference between the federal paid reimbursement rate and the federal free reimbursement rate for individual school, groups of schools, and school districts implementing the Community Eligibility Provision in eligible schools.

The program is needed for many reasons but the one closest to the school system's mission is support for the student's education.

We found that when the federal government paid for us to feed all students both breakfast and lunch at no cost to them, many good things happened in the school environment such as a significant reduction in discipline referrals, better attendance, less tardiness, more ability to focus on and participate in classes, improved test scores and improved diet quality.

Thank You for the opportunity to testify in writing and express strong support for SB 769.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elizabeth Leach".

Elizabeth Leach, MPH

# **SB769\_MOST\_FAVORABLE (1).pdf**

Uploaded by: Ellie Mitchell

Position: FAV





**SB 769 - Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment**  
**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**  
**February 24 2025**  
**Position: Favorable**

*The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST serves as the backbone organization for the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools. The Maryland Coalition for Community Schools, founded in 2016, advocates for student and family success by leading the charge to expand the Community School Model in Maryland. The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) advocates for adequate funding, equitable policies, and transparent accountability statewide.*

MOST, MD4CS & MEC enthusiastically support Senate Bill 769 to support expanding the use of community eligibility where appropriate in Maryland. Community Eligibility has several key benefits for students and school districts. Expanding community eligibility also aligns with the work underway at the Governor's Office for Children to determine the methodology for the Neighborhood Indicators of Poverty to replace administratively burdensome methods like the collection of individual Free and Reduced Meal forms.

In areas where poverty is widespread or concentrated, Community Eligibility removes the stigma of being categorized as a "FARM" student. It takes away out-of-pocket costs for families who are often already struggling. Removing these worries will make families more food secure and let students focus on their academics. Expanding Community Eligibility will also make it easier for afterschool programs to offer snacks and supper. It also removes the challenges of collecting individual FARM data for school districts, makes food access more equitable, and allows the districts to implement innovative delivery models. Passing this bill will also send a message to Congress that states like Maryland are committed to community eligibility– a critical tone to strike in the current climate.

MOST, MD4CS and MEC applaud Senator Guzzone for sponsoring Senate Bill 769 and urge a favorable report.

Rick Tyler, Co-Chair, MEC, [md.ed.coalition@gmail.com](mailto:md.ed.coalition@gmail.com)

Ellie Mitchell, Co-Chair, MEC, Director, MOST Network/MD4CS, [emitchell@mostnetwork.org](mailto:emitchell@mostnetwork.org)

**Maryland Out of School Time Network / Maryland Coalition for Community Schools** 1500 Union Ave / Suite 2300  
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[www.mostnetwork.org](http://www.mostnetwork.org)

# **Children's National Testimony - SB 769 - Emma Fros**

Uploaded by: Emma Frost

Position: FAV



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ChildrensNational.org

**Testimony of Emma Frost, MD, MPH  
Pediatric Resident  
Children's National Hospital**

**Danielle Dooley, MD, MPhil  
Medical Director, Community Affairs and Population Health  
Children's National Hospital**

**SB 769: Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment  
Position: FAVORABLE  
February 26, 2025  
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of Senate Bill 769. My name is Emma Frost, MD, MPH, and I am a pediatric resident at Children's National Hospital. 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 talk about what they eat daily and how they do in school.

Discussions about nutrition are ones that every pediatrician knows well. One in five American children is obese.<sup>1</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only a quarter of 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 all kids are eating well-balanced, nutritious diets that help reduce the risk of chronic medical conditions and stimulate brain development.<sup>3</sup> The parents and caregivers sitting in the office with me know that fruits and vegetables are important. They look uncomfortable when I ask how many fast-food meals and processed snacks they eat. The issue is not understanding or

lack of effort. When I asked them 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. It is harder to provide a nutritious meal for children than it used to be. The federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows school districts with high numbers of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals to provide breakfast and lunch free to all students. Data so far has suggested that it 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 who serve large numbers of low-income students can afford to provide nutritious breakfasts and lunches to all students free of charge.

Senate Bill 769 would help fill that gap. By establishing a Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program, it would provide additional funding to schools participating in CEP. 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 being a pediatrician is hearing my patients' success stories. I know that with the passage of Senate Bill 769, I will hear even more—children staying healthy, fit, and focused on school. I applaud Chair Guzzone 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 Senate Bill 769. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

**For more information, please contact:**

Austin Morris, Government Affairs Manager  
almorris@childrensnational.org

- 
1. Childhood Obesity Facts. cdc.gov. Updated on April 2, 2024. Accessed on February 17, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood-obesity-facts/childhood-obesity-facts.html>
  2. Hamner HC, Dooyema CA, Blanck HM, et al. Fruit, Vegetable, and Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Intake Among Young Children, by State — United States, 2021. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2023;72:165–170. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7207a1>
  3. 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=AfmBOopuQTAmI07YkGRFJoV906IPiJ0v8l8KRxK\\_9Vd1Ro55HqGm92t](https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood/early-childhood-health-and-development/nutrition-and-food-insecurity/?srsltid=AfmBOopuQTAmI07YkGRFJoV906IPiJ0v8l8KRxK_9Vd1Ro55HqGm92t)
  4. 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>
  5. 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>

# **SB0769\_\_FoodCorps\_FAV.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Heaven Lee

Position: FAV



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 769

### Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment

*Senate Budget & Taxation Committee*

*Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee*

February 26, 2025

Hon. Chair Guzzone and Members of the Budget & Taxation and the Education, Energy, and Environment Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 0769 which requires the Governor to allocate funding to eligible schools that participate in the federal community eligibility provision (CEP) of the child nutrition programs expanding nourishing school meals in schools to Maryland students who need it most; appropriates \$10,000,000. My name is Heaven Lee, and I am the Impact & Lead for Maryland & DC for FoodCorps, a national organization that partners with schools and communities to nourish kids' health and education. Across the state for the '24-'25 school year, FoodCorps has 4 members in working in Baltimore City Public Schools through a partnership with the school district via [Great Kids Farms](#) where they support nourishing school meals, provide food, garden, and nutrition education aligning with academic priorities, and help build community through food.

In Baltimore City Public Schools where we work this year will mark the 10-year anniversary of full CEP adoption allowing for all City students to eat free school lunch. In the 2023 - 2024 school year more than 73,000 meals were served each day – with the alleviation of the administrative burden of having families apply for free and reduced meals, paying for meals, and potentially putting families into debt has allowed to Food and Nutrition department to focus on the quality of the school food to align with the students needs.

School meals play an important role in reducing childhood hunger and ensuring that students are fueled up and ready to learn. However, too many children miss out on the benefits of school meals statewide because of the current tiered payment structure, which requires a family of four to earn less than \$57,000 annually to qualify for no-cost meals.

The CEP is a proven solution to this issue. This federal program allows high-poverty schools to serve free breakfast and lunch to all students, including in over 670 Maryland schools – reaching over 370,000 students across the state. Research has shown that CEP schools experience a range of benefits, including: increased meal participation, reduced stigma for students, elimination of school meal debt, and

**Get Involved**  
[foodcorps.org](https://foodcorps.org)

**Connect**  
[info@foodcorps.org](mailto:info@foodcorps.org)

**Follow Us**  
[@foodcorps](https://twitter.com/foodcorps)

improved staff morale<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, **students in CEP schools are approximately three times less likely to experience food insecurity** compared to those in eligible schools that do not participate<sup>2</sup>.

Despite these benefits, not all schools are able to use CEP because of limitations in the current federal reimbursement structure. Establishing a state CEP supplement would help make the program financially sustainable for more schools. This \$10 million per year investment from the state could help up to 200 additional schools opt into CEP and offer breakfast and lunch to the over 90,000 students attending those schools.

With the cost of living rising and more families struggling to meet basic needs, expanding the number of CEP schools in Maryland would be a game-changer for many students and their families. SB 769 would be an important steppingstone in Maryland's journey towards Healthy School Meals for All, helping to reduce hunger, improve student health and academic performance, and ease the financial burden on families already facing challenges.

Hungry kids can't wait. Now is the time for Maryland to make this critical investment to ensure more schools across the state are hunger-free!

Thank you for your consideration. We ask the committee to make a favorable report on SB 769.

Heaven Lee  
DC & MD Impact & Partnerships Lead  
FoodCorps

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<sup>1</sup> Hecht, A., Neff, R., Kelley, T., & Pollack Porter, K. (2021). Universal free schools meals through the Community Eligibility Provision: Maryland food service provider perspectives. In *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* (pp. 1–22). Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2021.102.033>.

<sup>2</sup> Gross, S.M., Kelley, T.L., Augustyn, M., Wilson, M.J., Bassarab, K., and Palmer, A. (2019). Household food security status of families with children attending schools that participate in the community eligibility provision (CEP) and those with children attending schools that are CEP-eligible, but not participating. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*. 2019 October; doi: 10.1080/19320248.2019.1679318.

# **20250224 SB769 Testimony Capital Area Food Bank.pd**

Uploaded by: Joseph Liu

Position: FAV





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February 26, 2025

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Committee:

The Capital Area Food Bank urges your support for SB0769 Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment. We especially want to thank the chair for his leadership in sponsoring this important legislation. 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.**



4900 Puerto Rico Avenue NE  
Washington, DC 20017  
(202) 644-9800  
[capitalareafoodbank.org](http://capitalareafoodbank.org)

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.**

# **MD Hunger Solutions - Support for SB 769 - CEP Exp**

Uploaded by: Julia Gross

Position: FAV



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 769

### Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program - Establishment

*Senate Budget & Taxation Committee*

*Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee*

February 26, 2025

**Maryland Hunger Solutions strongly supports SB 769**, which aims to provide state funding for schools opting into the Community Eligibility Provision to provide a healthy school breakfast and school lunch to all children at no cost to them or their families.

As a statewide, non-partisan, nonprofit working to end hunger in Maryland, Maryland Hunger Solutions strives to overcome existing barriers to state and federal nutrition assistance programs and create self-sustaining connections between Maryland residents and nutritious foods. Among these nutrition programs, the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program play the most critical role as the nation's first line of defense against childhood food insecurity.

The school meal programs have been shown to be some of the healthiest meals children consume on a daily basis, providing students with nutrition they need to learn and thrive during the school day and beyond. [Multiple studies have linked participation in school meals to an incredible number of beneficial outcomes for students](#) including reduced food insecurity, decreased rates of obesity, and improved overall nutrition and wellness. Beyond reducing hunger, this research also links participation in school meals to positive educational outcomes such as enhanced child development and school readiness, and improved academic achievement, attendance, and classroom behavior.

Maryland has made great strides in the past to expand access to school meals, such as covering the reduced-price copay for low-income families, and expanding the number of students directly certified for free meals through Medicaid data matching. However, the most effective way that schools can expand access to school meals is by participating in the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which is an existing federal provision that allows high-poverty schools and districts to provide school meals at no cost to students.

Schools and districts operating CEP do not charge a fee to students for school meals and instead receive federal reimbursements for meals served using a formula based on the percentage of children who are eligible to be directly certified for free meals without an application. This percentage is multiplied by 1.6 to calculate the percentage of meals reimbursed at the federal free rate (the highest federal reimbursement rate), and the remainder are reimbursed at the paid rate (the lowest federal reimbursement rate).

For example, a school with 50 percent directly certified students would be reimbursed for 80 percent of the meals eaten at the free reimbursement rate ( $50\% \times 1.6 = 80\%$ ), and the remaining 20 percent would be reimbursed at the paid rate.

Since its establishment in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the CEP has served as a critical resource for school districts to help keep children fed, alleviate child hunger, and advance racial equity and child well-being. The benefits we have seen from serving all students school meals at no cost through CEP underscore the importance of this nutritional safety net to the health and well-being of Maryland communities. Research conducted in Maryland points to the benefits of CEP, which include more children eating breakfast and lunch at school, families' ability to stretch their food budgets at home, and removing the burden of school meal debt from families and school systems.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, a study conducted by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health on the implementation of the CEP in Maryland clearly shows that students who attend CEP schools are almost three times less likely to be food insecure than their counterparts attending CEP eligible schools that don't participate in the program.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, **there are over 670 Maryland schools across 19 counties successfully using CEP to offer school meals for free to all 370,000 of their students**, including every school in Allegany County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Caroline County, Dorchester County, Kent County, Somerset County, and Wicomico County. **However, there are still just over 400 eligible schools across the state that are not participating**, in part due to the inadequate nature of the federal reimbursement formula that CEP schools use to calculate the funding they receive for meals served (Table 1).

CEP has played a fundamental role in supporting schools with a high percentage of students who reside in households experiencing low income. However, not all schools are able to opt into this vital program. The challenges faced by schools that are unable to opt into CEP are growing:

**Too many children who qualify for free school meals fall through the cracks due to stigma and administrative barriers.** When students perceive school meals as only for children from low-income households, many decline to participate, despite their hunger. Literacy and language barriers can also keep many eligible families from submitting school meal applications. Additionally, school meal applications place a heavy administrative burden on school nutrition departments, often requiring valuable time and resources to be diverted away from the program to process paperwork.

**The extremely low eligibility threshold excludes many more families.** For example, a family of four living with a household income of \$57,000 a year is unable to qualify for any assistance. With Maryland's already high cost of living and current inflation rates, more families than ever are struggling to make ends meet but do not qualify for free meals.

**School systems are reporting unprecedented increases in school meal debt.** Students and families are not the only ones facing these challenges. When families struggle to pay for school meals, schools take

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<sup>1</sup> Hecht, A., Neff, R., Kelley, T., & Pollack Porter, K. (2021). Universal free schools meals through the Community Eligibility Provision: Maryland food service provider perspectives. In *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* (pp. 1–22). Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2021.102.033>.

<sup>2</sup> Gross, S.M., Kelley, T.L., Augustyn, M., Wilson, M.J., Bassarab, K., and Palmer, A. (2019). Household food security status of families with children attending schools that participate in the community eligibility provision (CEP) and those with children attending schools that are CEP-eligible, but not participating. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*. 2019 October; doi: 10.1080/19320248.2019.1679318.

on the burden of those unpaid school meal fee, forcing them to spend valuable time and resources trying to find additional funds to cover their operating costs, often at the expense of general funds that would otherwise be used for educational programming and other important wraparound services.

**The solution remains clear.** At a time when historically high inflation and grocery prices are driving the need for these programs higher than ever, supporting Maryland school districts in maximizing their use of CEP is critical. SB 769 would establish \$10 million in state funding that school districts could apply for to make up the difference between a school's current CEP reimbursement rate and the 100% free-meal reimbursement rate set annually at the federal level. At this funding level, **a \$10 million state supplement could potentially allow up to 200 additional schools across the state to opt into CEP, impacting upwards of 275,000 students.** By passing and enacting SB 769, Maryland will be advancing equity, supporting students' education and health, and improving school nutrition operations.

While we look forward to a time when Maryland joins the list of states that provide school meals at no cost to ALL children, **Maryland Hunger Solutions respectfully urges a favorable report on SB 769** as an important step towards this goal by investing in our children's health and nutrition.

**Hungry children can't wait.** Thank you for your consideration.

**Table 1: Maryland school districts with non-participating CEP eligible schools**

District/Agency	# of Eligible but Non-Participating Schools*	Total Eligible but Non-Participating School Student Enrollment
Anne Arundel County	72	47,224
Calvert County	13	7,588
Carroll County	13	7,049
Cecil County	17	8,993
Charles County	21	15,273
Frederick County	31	20,215
Garrett County	12	3,491
Harford County	11	7,648
Howard County	24	17,275
Montgomery County	63	57,572
Prince George's County	63	46,573
Queen Anne's County	9	4,519
St. Mary's County	15	8,192
Talbot County	8	4,530
Washington County	27	15,664
Worcester County	4	3,268
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>275,074</b>

\*Based on estimates for individually eligible schools with an Identified Student Percentage (ISP) of 25%+ during SY2023-2024.

## **Sign-on Letter in Support of SB 769 - CEP Expansio**

Uploaded by: Julia Gross

Position: FAV

February 26, 2025

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 769**

Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment

*Senate Budget & Taxation Committee*

*Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee*

**On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we strongly support SB 769 – Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment**, which aims to expand access to school meals and increase the number of hunger-free schools in Maryland by supporting the implementation of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) – an existing federal provision that allows high-poverty schools and districts to provide school meal at no cost to all of their students.

We know that school meals play an important role in academic success, reducing childhood hunger, supporting good nutrition, and ensuring that students are well-nourished and ready to get the most out of their school day. Research links participation in school meals to positive education and health outcomes for our nation's children. School meals are just as important to academic success as textbooks, computers, and transportation, and all children should have access to them every school day.

As vital as the school nutrition programs are to ensuring children's access to healthy, nutritious meals, too many children in need miss out on school meals because of the programs' current structure. Many struggling families do not meet the eligibility threshold for no-cost meals, which requires a family of four to earn less than \$57,700 annually. The current structure with some children being offered meals at no cost, and others paying for their meals, also leads many children who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals to choose not to participate because of stigma.

Providing state funding to support CEP implementation, as outlined in SB 769, would take a meaningful step towards solving this problem by allowing more schools and districts to tap into this existing federal resource to serve meals at no cost to all attending students. **Currently, over 670 schools in Maryland use CEP to offer meals at no cost to over 370,000 students across 19 counties.** Research shows that these schools have benefitted from an increase in school meal participation, reduced stigma, and decreased financial strain on families.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, CEP has been shown to promote food security, with households of students attending CEP schools being three times less likely to be food insecure than households in non-CEP schools.<sup>2</sup>

Although any school or district where at least 25% of students are directly certified for free meals is eligible to participate in CEP, over 400 Maryland schools with a combined enrollment of over 275,000 students are currently not able to participate due to inadequate federal reimbursements. The reimbursements that CEP schools receive are calculated with a formula that is based on the percentage of directly certified students, which means that schools on the lower end of the eligibility spectrum often

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<sup>1</sup> Hecht, A., Neff, R., Kelley, T., & Pollack Porter, K. (2021). Universal free schools meals through the Community Eligibility Provision: Maryland food service provider perspectives. In *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* (pp. 1–22). Lyon Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2021.102.033>.

<sup>2</sup> Gross, S.M., Kelley, T.L., Augustyn, M., Wilson, M.J., Bassarab, K., and Palmer, A. (2019). Household food security status of families with children attending schools that participate in the community eligibility provision (CEP) and those with children attending schools that are CEP-eligible, but not participating. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*. 2019 October; doi: 10.1080/19320248.2019.1679318.



do not receive enough funding to cover the cost of their operations, making CEP financially unsustainable for these schools.

By contributing a state supplement, Maryland would be making up the difference between a school's current CEP reimbursement rate and the 100% free-meal reimbursement rate set annually at the federal level. The \$10 million allocation outlined in SB 769 would allow district flexibility and freedom to sustainably maintain their CEP schools and has the potential to allow an additional 200 schools to become hunger-free through CEP, potentially impacting over 90,000 Maryland students. For those schools, this bill would reduce stigma and ensure that all students have the nutrition they need during the school day. It would ease the pressure on families' household food budgets, allowing them to count on a nutritious school breakfast and lunch each school day to help make ends meet. It would reduce administrative work for school staff, and it would eliminate unpaid school meal fees, helping to ensure that the cafeteria is a positive place for all students and ending the financial burden that school meal debt creates for school districts.

**For these reasons, we, the undersigned organization, respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 769.**

Thank you for your consideration,

Agudath Israel of Maryland  
American Heart Association  
Anne Arundel County Food Bank, Inc.  
Baltimore City Food Policy and Planning Division  
Baltimore City Public Schools  
Baltimore Hunger Project  
Capital Area Food Bank  
Center for Science in the Public Interest  
FoodCorps  
Free State PTA  
Manna Food Center  
Maryland Center on Economic Policy  
Maryland Food Bank  
Maryland Hunger Solutions  
Maryland Nonprofits  
Maryland School Nutrition Association  
Montgomery County Food Council  
Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry Maryland  
Strong Schools Maryland  
Wicomico County Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services  
Young Democrats of Maryland

# **SB 769\_MD Center on Economic Policy\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Kali Schumitz

Position: FAV



# Expanding Access to No-Cost School Meals Will Boost Health and Learning For Maryland Students

## Position Statement Supporting Senate Bill 769

*Given before the Budget and Taxation and Senate Environment, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee*

In times of uncertainty and increased economic anxiety in Maryland households, reducing the financial strain on low-income families would be a significant relief. Expanding access to free school meals would improve health and education for Maryland children. **For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports SB 769.**

School meal programs are a critical resource that provide children with the nutrition they need to thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in both the short and long term. SB 769 would create more hunger-free schools in Maryland by supporting high-poverty schools and school districts in providing school meals at no cost to all their students through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

School meals play an important role in reducing childhood hunger and ensuring that students are fueled up and ready to learn. However, too many children miss out on the benefits of school meals because of the current tiered payment structure, which requires a family of four to earn less than \$57,000 annually to qualify for no-cost meals.

Community eligibility is a proven solution to this issue. This federal program allows high-poverty schools to serve free breakfast and lunch to all students, including in over 670 Maryland schools – reaching over 370,000 students across the state. Research has shown that CEP schools experience a range of benefits, including: increased meal participation, reduced stigma for students, elimination of school meal debt, and improved staff morale. Additionally, students in CEP schools are approximately three times less likely to experience food insecurity compared to those in eligible schools that do not participate.

Despite these benefits, not all schools are able to use CEP because of limitations in the current federal reimbursement structure. Establishing a state CEP supplement would help make the program financially sustainable for more schools. This \$10 million per year investment from the state could help up to 200 additional schools opt into CEP and offer breakfast and lunch to the over 90,000 students attending those schools.

Extensive research has linked participation in school meals to a number of benefits:

- Improved academic achievement, standardized test scores, and cognitive function;
- Improved attendance, which is positively linked to academic achievement;

- Reduced food insecurity, which is linked to poor academic outcomes;
- Improved nutrition, such as increased consumption of fruit, vegetables, and milk;
- Improved overall health and long-term health outcomes, as well as reduction in obesity rates, anxiety, and depression.

With the cost of living rising and more families struggling to meet basic needs, expanding the number of CEP schools in Maryland would be a game-changer for many students and their families. SB 769 would be an important steppingstone in Maryland's journey towards Healthy School Meals for All, helping to reduce hunger, improve student health and academic performance, and ease the financial burden on families already facing challenges. **For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Committee to make a favorable report on SB 769.**

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## **Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 769**

### *Bill summary*

SB 769 establishes a state Community Eligibility Program supplement which would help make the program financially sustainable for more schools. This \$10 million per year investment from the state could help up to 200 additional schools opt into CEP and offer breakfast and lunch to the over 90,000 students attending those schools.

### *Background*

Too many children in need are left out due to the current school meals program structure. To qualify for free school meals, a student's family must be living at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, which translates to annual income of less than \$34,000 for a family of three for the 2024–2025 school year. Because the eligibility threshold for these programs are so low, many Maryland families who struggle financially to meet their most basic needs do not qualify.

### *Equity Implications*

Policies in the past have led to a system of unequal opportunities for marginalized groups within Maryland. Although the most obviously racially discriminatory policies have long been overturned or mitigated, the impact of these policies continue to persist in both society and public policy and have led to significant racial and health disparities. Families with children, Marylanders of color, and people with disabilities are all more likely to qualify for and need food assistance programs because of these barriers. Children of color experience much higher rates of economic insecurity and poverty and are more likely to benefit from expanded access to school meals.

### *Impact*

Senate Bill 769 would likely **improve racial and economic equity** in Maryland.

# **Support AHA SB 769 CEP.pdf**

Uploaded by: Laura Hale

Position: FAV



February 12, 2024

Testimony of Laura Hale

American Heart Association

**Favorable SB 769 Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment**

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Honorable Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. The American Heart Association extends its strong support for SB 769 Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association.

For children to succeed in school, it is essential that they have a healthy lunch and a healthy breakfast. This legislation will expand Healthy School Meals for All to many schools across the state. This is the beginning of an important program.

A hungry child cannot learn. We as a state have set forth our priorities on where we will fund and the great wisdom has been made to push our children for academic achievement. We have set forth the task of funding a variety of things to make that better, but the space we currently lag behind is in the feeding of our children. Children cannot succeed without proper nutrition, and we know that for most children they receive up to half of their daily calories from school meals<sup>1</sup>. Research has also found that school meals are the healthiest meals that children receive each day<sup>2</sup>. During the pandemic we provided breakfast and lunch to all children, no questions asked, and it made a difference for families and kids. Now that the federal funding is gone, many children are falling through the cracks. Whether their parents make slightly too much money to qualify, whether forms are not filled out, or because of the stigma<sup>3</sup> of being labeled “the poor kid” children are not eating. We have the opportunity to change all of that with this legislation. We know this legislation works, a meta-analysis published by the NIH noted that when schools offered healthy school meals for all they, “found positive associations with diet quality, food security, and academic performance<sup>4</sup>.” This meta-analysis also outlines positive association in BMI and possibly improves in household income particularly for low-income families<sup>5</sup>.

Research out of Johns Hopkins showed how much offering free school meals for all made a difference, not only for children, but also for their families. As families who participated in school meals were able to stave off food insecurity or not become more food insecure. It was a key protective factor in making sure

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<sup>1</sup> [School Nutrition Environment | Healthy Schools | CDC](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Trends in Food Sources and Diet Quality Among US Children and Adults, 2003-2018 | Lifestyle Behaviors | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Participation in the National School Lunch Program: Importance of School-Level and Neighborhood Contextual Factors - Mirtcheva - 2009 - Journal of School Health - Wiley Online Library](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

Maryland families did not drop deeper into poverty or our middle-class families to not fall into poverty<sup>6</sup>. We can choose to leave no one behind, by investing and providing healthy school meals for all.

The American Heart Association urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 769.

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<sup>6</sup> [Pre-pandemic to early-pandemic changes in risk of household food insecurity among Maryland families with children - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

# **SB 769\_AACFB Testimony Favorable.pdf**

Uploaded by: Leah Paley

Position: FAV





## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 769**

### **Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment**

*Senate Budget & Taxation Committee*

*Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee*

February 26, 2025

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The Anne Arundel County Food Bank (AACFB) strongly supports SB 769 – Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment, which would create more hunger-free schools in Maryland by supporting high-poverty schools and school districts in providing school meals at no cost to all their students through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

For the past 39 years, AACFB has provided critical services such as food, emergency supplies, and other necessities free of charge to our extensive network of partners and the neighbors we serve throughout Anne Arundel County. Last year, in collaboration with our 76 Network Partners, we distributed 4.1 million pounds of food and essential supplies like baby diapers and feminine hygiene products, including 1.3 million pounds of fresh produce and lean proteins.

School meals are important in reducing childhood hunger and ensuring students are fueled and ready to learn. However, too many children miss out on the benefits of school meals because of the current tiered payment structure, which requires a family of four to earn less than \$57,000 annually to qualify for no-cost meals.

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a proven solution to address this issue. This federal program allows high-poverty schools to serve free breakfast and lunch to all students, including in over 670 Maryland schools – reaching over 370,000 students statewide. Research has shown that CEP schools experience various benefits, including increased meal participation, reduced stigma for students, elimination of school meal debt, and improved staff morale<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, students in CEP schools are approximately three

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<sup>1</sup> Hecht, A., Neff, R., Kelley, T., & Pollack Porter, K. (2021). Universal free schools meals through the Community Eligibility Provision: Maryland food service provider perspectives. In *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* (pp. 1–22). Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2021.102.033>.



times less likely to experience food insecurity compared to those in eligible schools that do not participate<sup>2</sup>.

Despite these benefits, not all schools can use CEP because of current federal reimbursement structure limitations. Establishing a state CEP supplement would help make the program financially sustainable for more schools. This \$10 million per year investment from the state could help up to 200 additional schools opt into CEP and offer breakfast and lunch to the over 90,000 students attending those schools.

With the cost of living rising and more families struggling to meet basic needs, expanding the number of CEP schools in Maryland would be a game-changer for many students and their families. SB 769 would be an important stepping stone in Maryland's journey towards Healthy School Meals for All, helping to reduce hunger, improve student health and academic performance, and ease the financial burden on families already facing challenges.

Hungry kids can't wait. Now is the time for Maryland to make this critical investment to ensure more hunger-free schools across the state!

**Thank you for your consideration. The Anne Arundel County Food Bank asks the committee to report favorably on SB 769.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Leah Paley".

Leah Aiello Paley, LMSW  
Chief Executive Officer  
Anne Arundel County Food Bank

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<sup>2</sup> Gross, S.M., Kelley, T.L., Augustyn, M., Wilson, M.J., Bassarab, K., and Palmer, A. (2019). Household food security status of families with children attending schools that participate in the community eligibility provision (CEP) and those with children attending schools that are CEP-eligible, but not participating. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*. 2019 October; doi: 10.1080/19320248.2019.1679318.

# **sb769 MD schools, nutrition B&T, EEE 2-26-2025.pdf**

Uploaded by: Lee Hudson

Position: FAV



**Delaware-Maryland Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

Testimony Prepared for the  
**Budget and Taxation Committee**  
And  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
on  
**Senate Bill 769**  
February 26, 2025  
Position: **Favorable**

Mistery Chairmen and members of the Committees, thank you for this opportunity to testify about nutrition and its role in the well-being of the children of our State. I am Lee Hudson, assistant to the bishop for public policy in the Delaware-Maryland Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are a faith community with membership in every region of the State.

Our community's work in policy advocacy began as a commitment to address hunger. It remains one of the principal goals of our advocacy work, nationally and internationally. It was advanced further in 1999 by "Economic Life," (ELCA, re: *the moral imperative to seek sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all*). We maintain a permanent institutional appeal to address and advocate an end to hunger.

Child hunger is something like a permanent public scandal in the United States. One of the social defects illuminated during the pandemic was a spike in malnourishment among children because of the loss of nutritional resources delivered by the public education system.

According to a *Save the Children* report, twelve million American children are hungry. Kentucky, **Maryland**, Oklahoma, and Washington, D.C. report a 22% rate of family hunger: in **Maryland**, Hispanic and Black families are almost 4 times as likely to face hunger as white families. Kennedy-Krieger reports that 12% of Maryland's children live in poverty, a reliable marker for malnutrition. For all the good work Maryland has done to address poverty via health care expansions, workfare, EITC, etc. these statistics shout that something is being left out.

It's Maryland's children. We must not leave them out. There are social, public health, education, and economic consequences to child hunger. Leave those aside in your consideration of **Senate Bill 769**. It is cruelty to child malnourishment with profit-loss ratios. *Hungry children have no agency over their condition.*

Maryland children, and almost certainly the hungry ones, are mandated by law to be public school children. Give them two acceptable meals a day. We understand that establishing a Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program to provide better nutrition to more Maryland children needing it. Please diminish appalling child hunger statistics, at least some, at least in Maryland, and report **Senate Bill 769** favorably.

Thank you for this important hearing.

Lee Hudson



# **klatko support sb0769.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mary Klatko

Position: FAV



**Testimony in Strong Support of SB 769**

**Primary and Secondary Education- Community Eligibility Provision- Hunger Free School Meals**

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**

February 25, 2025

Dear Senator Guzzone and Budget and Taxation Committee Members

I am writing to express our organization's strong support for SB 769.

My Name is Mary Klatko, I am the Legislative Co-Chair for the Maryland School Nutrition Association. We are the employees serving Nutritious Breakfasts and Lunches to the students in Maryland. We are managers, cooks, servers, dishwashers, dietitians, school-based staff and central office personnel.

We see students every day and love when they eat with us because we know the effects of good nutrition on both their health and education, all positive.

The purpose of this Bill is to provide state funding to cover the cost equal to the difference between the federal paid reimbursement rate and the federal free reimbursement rate for individual schools, groups of schools, and school districts implementing the Community Eligibility Provision in eligible schools.

The program is needed for many reasons but the one closest to the school system's mission is support for the student's education.

We found that when the federal government paid for us to feed all students both breakfast and lunch at no cost to them, many good things happened in the school environment such as a significant reduction in discipline referrals, better attendance, less tardiness, more ability to focus on and participate in classes, improved test scores and improved diet quality.

Thank You for the opportunity to testify in writing and express Maryland School Nutrition Association's strong support for SB 769.

Sincerely,

*Mary Klatko*

Mary Klatko  
State Legislative Co-Chair, Maryland School Nutrition Association

# **MDCAPE Testimony - SB769 - CEP EXPANSION - SUPPORT**

Uploaded by: Maryland CAPE

Position: FAV





## **SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE**

**FEBRUARY 26, 2025**

**SENATE BILL 769**

### **COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION EXPANSION PROGRAM – ESTABLISHMENT SUPPORT**

Maryland CAPE is our state's chapter and one of 40 state chapters of the Council for American Private Education. Our network includes the Catholic, Christian, Evangelical Lutheran, Friends, Independent, Jewish, Lutheran, Montessori, Muslim, and Seventh Day Adventist school communities. We speak on behalf of over 135,000 nonpublic school students attending over one thousand nonpublic schools across our great state of Maryland. We issue this testimony in support of Senate Bill 769.

SB 769 would complement federal funds from the Community Eligibility Provision of the Child Nutrition Programs by providing additional funding. The funds would be dispensed through county boards, based on the concentration of poverty in public schools and would consider geographic diversity in determining funding prioritization.

Food insecurity has become increasingly salient in discussions regarding improving the lot of vulnerable Marylanders. Food insecurity affects the entire family, but has a particularly negative effect on children and young adults. Without proper sustenance, students are more likely to struggle and suffer emotionally, academically, and physically. Repeated studies show that school food programs for students can lead to improved outcomes in many areas of life. Additionally, such a program lifts some of the economic burden that weighs down on parents struggling to make ends meet.

Food insecurity sadly affects students of public and nonpublic schools alike. Our nonpublic schools serve a diverse array of students, and we seek to ensure that all of them are able to overcome any food insecurity challenges, both for the sake of their own health and in order to increase their learning opportunities.

SB 769 would help ensure better outcomes for students by helping ensure that they receive the food they need. We respectfully ask that you issue a FAVORABLE REPORT on Senate Bill 769.

Thank you.

# **SB 769 - Community Eligibility Program Expansion P**

Uploaded by: Matthew Capodanno

Position: FAV

## **SB 769**

**Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment  
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
February 26, 2025**

### **SUPPORT**

Senate Bill 769 creates the Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program in the Maryland Department of Education. The bill funds the program at \$10 million, which would be paid by the state to schools that participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of the National School Lunch Program.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders are at risk of food insecurity. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, including families with children and communities of color. The causes of food insecurity are complex and often include additional factors such as low income, lack of reliable transportation, and missing community resources such as grocery stores.

The economic stability of a child's family should not dictate whether they are able to eat nutritious food every day, yet for too many Marylanders this is the reality. More than 1 in 3 Maryland families making less than \$35,000 a year are considered food insufficient. However, it is not just families in the lowest income bracket who are struggling. 35.5% of all Marylanders are finding it difficult to afford their basic household necessities – including food, and more alarming is that 34.7% of Maryland families report that their children are not eating enough because food is unaffordable.

The Maryland Food Bank sees firsthand the absolute beneficial impact of meals that are served while children are at schools or other safe community centers through our Supper Club, which served over 480,000 meals at 57 sites to children after school in FY 24, and our Summer Club, which served over 72,000 meals at 40 sites to children during the summer of 2024. Further, we operate food pantries at 185 K-12 schools across the state, where in FY 24 we distributed the equivalent of over 2.4 million meals serving approximately 48,000 Maryland families. The sheer magnitude of need is present in these programs, and the Maryland Food Bank knows that our efforts, while substantial, cannot alone solve child food insecurity in the state, as a crucial time of day for children to eat is missing – namely, breakfasts and lunches.

The Maryland Food Bank appreciates your consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 769.

# **Megan Doran Written Testimony SB79.pdf**

Uploaded by: Megan Doran

Position: FAV



**St. Mary's County Public Schools**  
**Division of Supporting Services**  
**Department of Food and Nutrition Services**  
27190 Point Lookout Road  
Loveville, Maryland 20656

Phone: 301-475-4256 ext. 5; Fax: 301-475-4207

**Mrs. Megan Doran**  
Director

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**Testimony in Support of SB 769**

**Primary and Secondary Education- Community Eligibility Provision-**  
**Hunger Free School Meals**

**Senate Budget and Taxation and Education, Energy and the Environment**

**February 25, 2025**

Dear Senator Guzzone and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

My name is Megan Doran, and I am the Director of Food and Nutrition Services for St. Mary's County Public Schools and Past President for Maryland School Nutrition Association. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 769, which aims to secure state funding to bridge the gap between federal reimbursement rates for schools implementing the Community Eligibility Provision.

This bill is essential as it addresses a critical need within our educational framework. By providing funding to cover the difference in reimbursement rates, we can ensure that all eligible schools receive adequate financial support to maintain their meal programs effectively.

The positive impact of this program on our students' education cannot be overstated. When students have access to free meals, we observe remarkable improvements in their overall school experience, including enhanced focus, participation, and academic performance.

Moreover, we have seen a significant reduction in discipline referrals, better attendance rates, and improved diet quality when all students are provided breakfast and lunch at no cost. These benefits align closely with our school system's mission to foster a conducive learning environment.

Thank you for considering my testimony regarding SB 769. Your support is vital for the continued success of our students and schools.

# **MD CEP Expansion Testimony\_2.24.25.pdf**

Uploaded by: Meghan Maroney

Position: FAV



February 26, 2025

RE: Written Testimony in Support of SB 769, Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment, Prepared for the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee Hearing

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), a science-based consumer advocacy organization and member of the Healthy School Meals for All Maryland Coalition.<sup>i</sup> I am also a Prince George's County, Maryland resident and a mother of two young children. I would like to take this opportunity to express strong support for expanding access to free school meals for more Maryland students, as proposed in SB 769. CSPI is a fierce defendant of science-based nutrition standards for school meals and has worked on improving school food for decades. Prior to our involvement in the passage of the federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which led to sweeping improvements in school nutrition, CSPI worked with state and local advocates to pass innovative school nutrition policies across the country. Following the Trump administration's 2018 rule that weakened school nutrition standards, CSPI sued the Administration and won, ultimately getting their rule overturned. s, including involvement in approximately a dozen statewide healthy school meals for all campaigns.

**CSPI urges the committee to make a favorable report on SB 769.** SB 769 aims to expand access to school meals and increase the number of hunger-free schools in Maryland by making the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) financially viable to eligible schools. CEP is an existing federal provision that allows high-poverty schools and districts to provide school meals at no cost to all students.

### **Expanding Access to School Meals Will Provide Needed Economic Support for Families**

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, federal funds allowed all students nationwide to receive free breakfast and lunch, regardless of household income.<sup>ii</sup> Despite an overwhelmingly positive response from school districts, families, and public health and education advocates, Congress allowed this provision to expire in summer 2022.<sup>iii</sup> In response to this change, several states, including California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Vermont have moved to ensure free access to school meals for students statewide.<sup>iv</sup> SB 769 would be an important steppingstone towards ensuring every student in Maryland has access to free school meals.

Maryland has already recognized the critical role school meals play. The Maryland Meals for Achievement program allows eligible schools to offer free breakfast in the classroom,<sup>v</sup> and the Maryland Cares for Kids Act of 2018 ensures any child eligible for free or reduced-price meals receives a free meal.<sup>vi</sup> However, even with these policies, current eligibility criteria leave far too many Maryland children behind, including those from lower and middle-class families struggling to make ends meet. This school year, for a student to receive free meals in Maryland, their household income cannot exceed \$58,000 annually for a family of four. Inflation is hurting families' budgets, and many cannot shoulder the cost of school meals. For those who do qualify for free meals, stigma and shame associated with qualifying prevent students from participating.<sup>vii</sup> Nowhere else during the school day do we require proof of family income like we do in the cafeteria. For example, schools willingly provide books and transportation regardless of family income. School meals, which are an invaluable opportunity to instill healthy eating habits for life, and critical for ensuring that children are ready to learn, should be treated no differently.

## **Expanding Access to School Meals Will Promote Nutrition, Food Security, and Academic Performance**

A systematic review examining free school meals for all policies found that they are positively associated with school meal participation, and in many cases, are positively associated with diet quality, food security, and academic performance.<sup>viii</sup> Research shows that in 2017-2018, food consumed at school was the highest quality source of food for kids – followed by grocery stores, other sources, worksites, and restaurants.<sup>ix</sup>

## **Expanding Access to School Meals Can Advance Equity**

Expanding access to school meals through CEP can remove stigma for children participating in the program and provide equitable access to healthy meals. A recent report found that when all students have access to free meals, perceptions of bullying and fighting decrease outside of school and kids that previously were income-eligible for free- or reduced-priced meals felt safer inside the school, including the cafeteria.<sup>x</sup> Expanding access to school meals will help ensure that children who might be on the edges of eligibility, or children who are experiencing homelessness, have recently immigrated, have caregivers who may struggle with administrative paperwork, or are in foster care do not fall through the cracks.

No child deserves to be hungry at school. Now is the time for Maryland to make this critical investment in school meals to ensure the health and wellbeing of all children.

As such, I thank you for your consideration and urge a favorable report on SB 769.



Meghan Maroney  
Campaign Manager, Federal Child Nutrition Programs  
Center for Science in the Public Interest

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<sup>i</sup> Healthy School Meals for All Maryland Coalition. *Healthy School Meals for All Maryland*. 2025. [Healthy School Meals for All Maryland](#). Accessed February 24, 2025.

<sup>ii</sup> Families First Coronavirus Response Act. P.L. 116-127 § 2202, 134 Stat. 185.

<sup>iii</sup> Keep Kids Fed Act of 2022. P.L. 117-158.

<sup>iv</sup> Food Research and Action Center. *Raise Your Hand for Healthy School Meals for All*. February 2025. [Healthy School Meals for All \(frac.org\)](#). Accessed February 24, 2025.

<sup>v</sup> Maryland Hunger Solutions. Maryland Meals for Achievement. 2020. <https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/federal-nutrition-programs/school-breakfast-program-sbp/maryland-meals-for-achievement/>. Accessed February 24, 2025.

<sup>vi</sup> Maryland Cares for Kids Act. H.B. 315. 2018.

<sup>vii</sup> Cohen J et al. Impact of Massachusetts' Healthy School Meals for All Policy on Families. Nourish Lab at the Center for Health Inclusion, Research and Practice. June 2023. [https://www.childnourishlab.org/files/ugd/383bcd\\_45ee5fed8e224ffd8639f0f498086e31.pdf](https://www.childnourishlab.org/files/ugd/383bcd_45ee5fed8e224ffd8639f0f498086e31.pdf). Accessed February 24, 2025.

<sup>viii</sup> Cohen J, et al. Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review. *Nutrients*. 2021; 13(3):911.

<sup>ix</sup> Liu J, et al. Trends in Food Sources and Diet Quality Among US Children and Adults, 2003-2018. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021;4(4):e215262.

<sup>x</sup> Gutierrez E. The Effect of Universal Free Meals on Student Perceptions of School Climate: Evidence from New York City. Pages 22, 24. June 2021. EdWorkingPaper: 21-430. Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University.



# **Agudah testimony - SB769- CEP Expansion - FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Rabbi Ariel Sadwin

Position: FAV



**SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE**

**FEBRUARY 26, 2025**

**SENATE BILL 769**

**COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION EXPANSION PROGRAM – ESTABLISHMENT  
SUPPORT**

Agudath Israel of Maryland, the Mid-Atlantic regional office of Agudath Israel of America – a renowned national Jewish advocacy organization with chapters across the country - speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland and on the behalf of the many Jewish schools and students within our state. We stand today in support of Senate Bill 769.

SB 769 would complement federal funds from the Community Eligibility Provision of the Child Nutrition Programs by providing additional funding for student meals. The funds would be dispensed through county boards, based on the concentration of poverty in public schools and would consider geographic diversity in determining funding prioritization.

Food insecurity has become a growing concern in efforts to improve the well-being of vulnerable Maryland residents. It impacts families as a whole, with children and young adults experiencing the most severe effects. When students lack proper nutrition, they are more likely to face challenges emotionally, academically, and physically. Research consistently shows that school food programs can lead to better outcomes in various aspects of life. Furthermore, these programs help ease the financial strain on parents who are already struggling to provide for their families.

Our schools are, sadly, no less familiar with student nutrition challenges and food insecurity than other schools are. Many of our schools participate in the CEP, and this bill would help us move closer to ensuring that all students are able to thrive by receiving the nutrition they need to succeed.

We therefore ask that you issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 769. Thank you very much.

# **SB 769 - FAV - MSEA.pdf**

Uploaded by: Samantha Zwerling

Position: FAV

**FAVORABLE  
Senate Bill 769  
Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program - Establishment**

**Senate Budget & Taxation Committee  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
February 26, 2025**

**Samantha Zwerling  
Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 769, which would help ensure that students can access free school meals and bridge the gap between funding sources for schools.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents over 40 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Hungry children cannot be expected to fully engage in their learning if they are distracted by their empty bellies. By ensuring that all students have access to healthy school meals, we are making a significant investment in our state's most precious resource. Providing every child in our state with the nutritious meal their growing bodies need to thrive not only helps them be better prepared to learn, it's also the right and humane thing to do.

Educators know all too well that, for far too many of our students, the only source of a nutritious meal they might have access to in a day is at their school. Few things are more gut wrenching to educators than seeing their students suffer, particularly for the want of the sufficient amount of food their growing bodies need to survive and thrive. Hungry children experience real and lasting health impacts that can put their physical, mental, and cognitive development at risk as well as their social-emotional functioning. These impacts lead to deleterious effects such as poorer academic and behavioral outcomes for the children in our schools. Hungry children cannot be expected to fully engage in their learning if their attention is rapt by the rumbling and discomfort in their empty bellies.



This bill pairs nicely with the work the General Assembly has done through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and builds on the last decade of meal expansion bills for students. The General Assembly and education advocates have worked in tandem to bring greater focus to community schools and to provide targeted resources to students living in concentrated poverty. As we work to stand-up community schools around the state with important wrap around services, universal meals is another piece of that puzzle.

**MSEA urges a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 769.**

# **SB 769\_Stacey Bisnette\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Stacey Bisnette

Position: FAV

## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 769**

### **Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment**

*Senate Budget & Taxation Committee*

*Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee*

February 26, 2025

I Stacey Bisnette strongly support SB 769 – Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment, which would create more hunger-free schools in Maryland by supporting high-poverty schools and school districts in providing school meals at no cost to all their students through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

As a single mother navigating a difficult divorce from an abusive spouse, I worked two jobs to support myself and my two children while also pursuing my degree. During this challenging time, the public school system became more than just an educational institution for my children—it served as a vital resource for our entire family. It provided a safe and supportive environment where my children could thrive, and the availability of school-provided breakfast and lunch was invaluable. Although working multiple jobs, my salary was unable to sufficiently meet our nutritional needs, these meals ensured that my children were well-nourished, allowing them to perform better in school. Knowing they had access to consistent meals relieved a significant burden, enabling me to focus on advancing my education and securing better employment opportunities for our future.

School meal programs can profoundly impact the lives of students, parents, and caregivers in ways that are often immeasurable. Through perseverance, I earned my bachelor's degree and went on to complete a master's in public health. Throughout my journey, I have never lost sight of the critical support we received, particularly the role school meal programs played in fostering my children's well-being and academic success. Now, as a community health advocate, I am committed to giving back to the same communities that supported my family. I strongly advocate for initiatives like the Community Eligibility Provision program to ensure that all children have the opportunity to excel in school without the added stress of food insecurity.

The Community Eligibility Provision is an important pathway to Healthy School Meals for All - supporting students' academic achievement and healthy development. The CEP's offering of school meals to all students at no cost is a vital and necessary public health investment that is critical to supporting positive educational outcomes, and is instrumental in advancing racial equity by helping to ensure that all students have the nutritional foundation they need. Every child should have access to the nutrition they need to succeed. Maryland has the ability to make Healthy School Meals for All a reality, and CEP offers an important step toward achieving that goal.

School meals play an important role in reducing childhood hunger and ensuring that students are fueled up and ready to learn. However, too many children miss out on the benefits of school meals because of the current tiered payment structure, which requires a family of four to earn less than \$57,000 annually to qualify for no-cost meals.

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a proven solution to this issue. This federal program allows high-poverty schools to serve free breakfast and lunch to all students, including in over 670 Maryland schools – reaching over 370,000 students across the state. Research has shown that CEP schools experience a range of benefits, including: increased meal participation, reduced stigma for students, elimination of school meal debt, and improved staff morale. Additionally, students in CEP schools are approximately three times less likely to experience food insecurity compared to those in eligible schools that do not participate.

Despite these benefits, not all schools are able to use CEP because of limitations in the current federal reimbursement structure. Establishing a state CEP supplement would help make the program financially sustainable for more schools. This \$10 million per year investment from the state could help up to 200 additional schools opt into CEP and offer breakfast and lunch to the over 90,000 students attending those schools.

With the cost of living rising and more families struggling to meet basic needs, expanding the number of CEP schools in Maryland would be a game-changer for many students and their families. SB 769 would be an important steppingstone in Maryland's journey towards Healthy School Meals for All, helping to reduce hunger, improve student health and academic performance, and ease the financial burden on families already facing challenges.

Hungry kids can't wait. Now is the time for Maryland to make this critical investment to ensure more schools across the state are hunger-free!

**Thank you for your consideration. I ask the committee to make a favorable report on SB 769.**

**Stacey Bisnette, MPH, CHES**



# **SB769CIF\_fav.pdf**

Uploaded by: Steven Mandel

Position: FAV



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM (CIF) OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND  
BEFORE THE SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE  
IN SUPPORT OF SB 769: COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION EXPANSION PROGRAM-  
ESTABLISHMENT  
FEBRUARY 25, 2025**

**FAVORABLE**

Honorable Chair Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Committee:

CIF is a coalition of three synagogues in Montgomery County, Kol Shalom, Adat Shalom, and Temple Beth Ami, that include over 1750 households and three denominations of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist. CIF serves as a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on policy issues, such as food insecurity, that relate to our shared values, including the Jewish traditions that emphasize the sanctity and primacy of human life. CIF provides this testimony in strong support of SB 769, which would provide State funding for schools utilizing the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

CIF recognizes that even before the COVID pandemic, there were a large number of families, particularly families of color, that struggled with food insecurity. The pandemic only increased the number of families struggling to cover basic human needs, such as food. And the Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (ERS) reports that hunger in America has soared in the years after pandemic relief efforts wound down. The ERS found that 10.4% of Maryland households were food insecure in 2023. Rabbitt, Reed-Jones, Hales & Burke (2024), Household Food Security in the United States in 2023 (Report No. ERR-377, USDA, ERS). According to the Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC's) dashboard of August 2023 (based on the USDA Household Pulse Survey), 17.7% of Black households, 19.2% of households with high school or less education, and 12.5% of female households in Maryland are food insufficient. Recent inflation and rising food costs (e.g., eggs) have been particularly challenging for families with limited incomes.

Moreover, children were food insecure at times during 2023 in 8.9% of U.S. households with children, up from 6.2% in 2021. Rabbit, et al. **School meals play a crucial role in reducing childhood hunger.** It must be emphasized that lunches consumed from school are the **most nutritious**. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, students who eat school lunches are more likely to consume milk, fruit and vegetables at lunch than students who eat

lunch from home or other places. And students who eat school lunches are less likely to consume desserts, snack items, and non-milk beverages at lunch.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition--and-meal-cost-study>. Research shows that hungry children do not learn as well as children who are well nourished, and hunger also affects their physical and emotional well-being. FRAC (2021), "School Meals are Essential for Student Health and Learning," available at <https://frac.org/wpcontent/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning.pdf>.

The federal Community Eligibility Provision allows high-poverty schools to offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students while eliminating the traditional school meal application process. But while participation in CEP has grown substantially in Maryland over the past few years, many schools do not consider CEP a financially viable option because the federal reimbursement rate is based on the number of students directly certified for free meals (ISP). Schools that teach low-income students but have an ISP below 62.5% are reimbursed at a lower level for a certain number of the free meals served. SB 769 would begin to close this reimbursement gap.

This carefully-targeted bill builds off the important investments made in the 2019 Blueprint for Maryland's Future by supporting equity in the classroom and ensuring that every child has the nutrition he or she needs in order to excel. Offering free meals in CEP schools not only assures that **each** child has a minimum level of nourishment, but also (1) removes the stigma associated with means-tested school meals programs, (2) opens the program to families not currently eligible for free meals due to the low-income cutoff, (3) ends unpaid school meal debt, and (4) eliminates administrative burdens for schools.

**CIF requests a favorable report on SB 769.**



# **MD Catholic Conference\_SB 769\_FWA.pdf**

Uploaded by: Garrett O'Day

Position: FWA



February 26, 2025

**SB 769**  
**Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion**

**Senate Budget & Taxation Committee**  
**Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee**  
**Position: FAVORABLE w/ Amendment**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 769, 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.

Senate Bill 769 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 Senate Bill 769.

# **DBM SB0769 - Letter of Information.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Dana Phillips

Position: INFO

WES MOORE  
Governor

ARUNA MILLER  
Lieutenant Governor



HELENE GRADY  
Secretary

MARC L. NICOLE  
Deputy Secretary

## **SENATE BILL 769 Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment**

### **Letter of Information**

**DATE: February 26th, 2025**

**COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation Committee**

**SUMMARY OF BILL:** SB 769 requires the State to pay the difference between the federal paid reimbursement rate and the federal free reimbursement rate for schools that participate in the Community Eligibility Provision. It mandates the Governor to budget \$10 million towards this expansion program annually starting in FY 2027. It also establishes requirements for MSDE to determine funding allocations based on certain criteria and for MSDE to submit an annual report to the MGA.

**EXPLANATION:** Under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), enrolled schools receive a single reimbursement rate to provide free meals to all students. Under standard school meals funding, schools receive different reimbursement rates for income-eligible students to receive reduced-price or free meals (the “free rate”) and other students to pay full price (the “paid rate”). Enrollment in CEP is not required and some schools choose not to participate because enrollment would reduce the total amount of federal reimbursement.

This bill would encourage certain schools to enroll in the CEP, namely those schools with lower identified student percentages (ISP), which tend to be more wealthy schools. It would likely increase the number of schools and LEAs that participate in CEP, because the State would make up for any federal funding decrease. There would be significant operational impacts on schools that provide universal meals; schools would require more storage space, equipment, and staffing to accommodate increased inventory and food prep.

Furthermore, the MSDE and LEAs will no longer be able to utilize free and reduced-price meal data as a metric for school funding formulas, including the compensatory education program, Title I, and the concentration of poverty grant.

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<http://dbm.maryland.gov>



The cost of the expansion program could easily exceed \$10 million annually, but the bill appears to be intended to cap expenditures rather than consider this an entitlement.

**For additional information, contact Dana Phillips at  
(410) 260-6068 or [dana.phillips@maryland.gov](mailto:dana.phillips@maryland.gov)**

# **SB0769- State Board- LOI.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mary Gable

Position: INFO

TO: Senate Committee on Budget and Taxation

BILL: Senate Bill 769- Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment

DATE: February 26, 2025

POSITION: Information

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The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing information on **Senate Bill 769- Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment**. This bill establishes the Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), which will provide funding to eligible public and non-public schools that participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of the federal child nutrition programs. The bill requests an annual appropriation of \$10,000,000 starting in fiscal year 2027.

**Senate Bill 769** is intended to expand the number of free school meals provided to Maryland students by leveraging CEP. CEP allows high poverty schools to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (June 2024), “CEP is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications.”<sup>1</sup> CEP started in Maryland in 5 schools in Washington County during the 2013-2014 school year, followed by 25 schools from multiple counties in 2014-2015. In SY 24-25, over 700 Maryland schools participate in CEP among 18 public and 5 non-public local education agencies (LEAs). Furthermore, 5 of these LEAs (4 public and 1 non-public) now have a 100% CEP claiming percentage (all meals are reimbursed at the free rate).

To elect CEP, LEAs must meet the 25% minimum threshold (in some combination of schools) of enrolled students that are identified as eligible. Using a formula based on the number of eligible or identified students, the percentage of meals to be reimbursed at the Federal free rate is calculated based on USDA’s annual rate schedule. Any remaining meals are reimbursed at the Federal paid rate. LEAs are also required to cover any costs of providing meals to students that exceed the federal reimbursement with non-federal funds throughout the school year. If the federal government increased the threshold in the future that would limit the number of students who would be eligible for free meals and increase the costs for participating LEAs.

Under **SB 769**, the appropriation to cover the differential amount between meals reimbursed at the free and paid rates would last approximately three months. This conclusion is based on an analysis of paid breakfast and lunch meals among participating CEP schools (excluding those schools that are already reimbursed at 100% free) developed by the MSDE Office of School and Community Nutrition Programs (OSCNP). The calculations consider the higher Federal severe need reimbursement for breakfast and the Federal performance-based reimbursement (PBR) and bonus for lunch.

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<sup>1</sup> USDA. (2024). “Community Eligibility Provision.” Washington, DC: USDA.

[https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/cep#:~:text=The%20Community%20Eligibility%20Provision%20\(CEP,students%20without%20collecting%20household%20applications](https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/cep#:~:text=The%20Community%20Eligibility%20Provision%20(CEP,students%20without%20collecting%20household%20applications)

Based on these calculations, the difference between the free and paid reimbursement rates for one month of breakfast and lunch among participating CEP schools is minimally \$2,888,124. If severe need is factored, the cost increases to \$3,057,573. Subsequently, if the CEP expansion appropriation was only applied to the differential amount for lunch it would stretch to almost 5 months. However, this would not be our recommendation as the intent of the CEP regulation is to provide both breakfast and lunch.

To administer the annual appropriation, OSCNP proposes to use the paid meal claims data of eligible LEAs in October of each year (when other meal program data is collected) to determine their share of the allocation based on the same analysis described above. However, it is strongly recommended that 1.5% (\$150,000) of the appropriation be utilized in each of the first 2 years to hire a consultant to gather feedback on the proposed allocation plan from LEAs, potentially develop an alternative strategy to ensure an equitable geographic and financially viable allocation, and then evaluate outcomes and impact.

MSDE supports the concept of expanding CEP and providing universal free school meals for students. As noted in the MSDE report on universal meals submitted to the Assembly last December<sup>2</sup>, the cost of universal meals in public schools in SY 25-26 is estimated as \$162 million after considering CEP and federal reimbursements (non-public schools were not included in this calculation). If enacted, the **SB 769** appropriation would provide short-term financial relief to LEAs for operational costs not sufficiently covered by the reimbursement formula when electing CEP. By filling this gap, it is believed that LEAs may have the ability to bring some new schools onto the program in the first year. However, they may not necessarily be able to do so in subsequent years as there is no growth in the appropriation. The appropriation also would not facilitate a 100% CEP claiming percentage or universal free meals in all schools.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **SB 769**. Please contact Akilah Alleyne, Ph.D. (Executive Director of Government Affairs) , [akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov](mailto:akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov), for any additional information.

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<sup>2</sup> MSDE. (2024). "Breakfast and lunch programs - universal expansion report". Baltimore, MD: MSDE.  
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