

**HB 704**  
**Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment**  
**House Appropriations Committee**  
**February 17, 2026**

**SUPPORT**

House Bill 704 creates the Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program in the Maryland State 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. However, it is not just families in the lowest income bracket who are struggling. In 2025, 39% of Marylanders found it difficult to afford their basic household necessities – including food, and more alarming is that food insecurity has increased 25% since 2019, and child hunger alone has increased 12%.

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 and our Summer Club, which served 596,176 meals combined in FY25. Further, we operate food pantries at 172 K-12 schools across the state, where in FY25 we distributed the equivalent of over 2.1 million meals. 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 HB 704.