

February 9, 2026

**Written Testimony on HB 704
Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment
Ways and Means and Appropriations
Position: Favorable**

Dear Ways and Means and Appropriations Committee Members:

My name is Julie A. Rosen, and I submit this written testimony as an individual resident of Montgomery County, Maryland (MD District 16), and a member of the National Council of Jewish Women, MD State Project Advocacy Committee. I write to urge your support for **HB 704 Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment**.

My first exposure to young children students who are not provided with breakfast or lunch was when I served as a high school tutor of elementary students in Baltimore, MD. Those weekend mornings allowed me to teach a young child about the use of ‘dry math’ concepts to everyday life, which was enlightening to my proteges. Even more enlightening was my learning of the challenges these students had to thrive at school when they were far from thriving at home due to lack of access to food. Since that time, and as part of the values I was taught by my Jewish heritage, I have considering coaching of young students to hold dear both of those informative undertakings. This life view is at the core of my understanding of HB704.

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 \$59,500 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 700 Maryland schools – reaching over 390,000 students across the state. However, despite the demonstrated benefits of CEP, not all schools are able to use CEP because of limitations in the current federal reimbursement structure. Moreover, recent cuts to SNAP and Medicaid at the federal level threaten to reduce the number of students who are able to be directly certified for free school meals, which will make it harder for schools and districts to meet the minimum CEP eligibility threshold and cause federal reimbursements to become even more inadequate to maintain operations. I am aware of recent surveys of the MD schools who did not file for CEP because of the burden of such paperwork.

Establishing a \$10 million state CEP supplement fund as outlined in this bill would help make the program financially sustainable for more schools across the state, as well as protect the financial sustainability of the program in existing CEP schools that are at risk of decreased federal reimbursements.

If we cannot feed the most vulnerable children in our community schools, then the future of MD as a ‘family friendly’ place to reside and raise the next generation is at risk. I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB704. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Julie A. Rosen, Ph.D.