



Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony
HB704: Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program - Establishment
February 17, 2026
SUPPORT

TO: The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair; The Honorable Anne Kaiser, Vice Chair; and Members of the Appropriations Committee
FROM: The Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board, the County’s local, state, and federally designated anti-poverty group, strongly supports HB704, which would provide funding to eligible schools that participate in the federal Community Eligibility provision (CEP) of the child nutrition programs. Such funding would be useful to these schools because it would cover the difference between the federal reimbursement rate and the federal free reimbursement rate. This additional funding may encourage schools that are eligible for the community eligibility program, but not currently participating, to consider participating. Community Eligibility is a critical program that allows all students in a school with a 25% or higher of Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) rate to receive free breakfast and lunch. Currently 60 MCPS schools are operating under the Community Eligibility Provision.¹

The food bank’s September 2025 report found that 36% of the DMV (about 1.5 million people) didn’t always know where their next meal would come from. Notably, 22% fall into the most severe category, classified as very low food insecurity.² The goal of this bill is to mitigate food insecurity within our community. Food insecurity is the lack of consistent access to sufficient, nutritious food necessary to maintain an active and healthy life. Key factors contributing to food insecurity include low or unstable income, high cost of living, high healthcare costs, as well as systemic barriers to food access. Currently, about 35% of County residents experience food insecurity, an increase from 27% in 2023. Food insecurity can seriously impact an individual’s physical and mental health, and overall well-being. Most importantly, food insecurity can have a significant impact on a child’s ability to learn. The cost of living in Montgomery County is exceedingly high: According to the Self-Sufficiency Standard, a family of four consisting of two adults, one school-age child, and one preschooler must earn \$122,943 to meet basic needs.³ This is

¹ <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/food-and-nutrition/free-reduced-meals/#Free>

² https://www.capitalareafoodbank.org/hunger-in-our-region/hunger-report/?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fmocofoodcouncil.org%2F

³ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/OCA/CommunityAction/Self-SufficiencyStandard.html>

over four times the Federal Poverty Level. Federal reductions in SNAP simply compound the problem.

FARMS eligibility is based either on participation in federal programs such as SNAP or household incomes at or below 130% and 185% of the federal poverty level. The effective FARMS rate in Montgomery County Public Schools is 43.29%.⁴ This amounts to 67,703 students, more students than in the District of Columbia Public Schools.

HB704 will provide free and reduced meals to all students in CEP schools, ensuring guaranteed access at no cost. This includes students who qualify for FARMS but choose not to apply due to concerns of stigmatization. HB704 adds one more weapon in the war against food insecurity and provides needed nutrition to many youngsters now not receiving it.

The Montgomery County Community Action Board strongly supports HB704 and asks for your favorable report.

⁴<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/siteassets/district/departments/food-and-nutrition/meal-payments/mcpsofficialfarms2025-2026.pdf>