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February 17, 2026

Chair Ben Barnes, Vice Chair Anne Kaiser, and members of the Appropriations Committee

House Bill 704 - Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program – Establishment

Position: SUPPORT

From: Dr. Charoscar Coleman, Chief Operating Officer, Prince George's County Public Schools

Contact: Dr. Phelton Moss, Chair, Policy and Governance Committee
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Dear Chair Barnes and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

Chair Barnes and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 704.

At its core, this legislation is about dignity. It is about ensuring that no child sits in a classroom distracted by hunger, worried about whether their lunch account is in the negative, or feeling singled out because their family is struggling.

Today, 136 Prince George's County Public Schools participate in the Federal Community Eligibility Provision, allowing students to eat at no cost. But too many schools remain excluded—not because the need isn't there, but because the financial math simply does not work. These bills close that gap by covering the difference between federal reimbursement rates, making universal meals financially sustainable.

The impact is immediate and human.

It means fewer children carrying the invisible weight of meal debt.

It means principals can invest scarce resources in instruction instead of unpaid lunch balances.

And at a time when our district faces a projected \$150 million budget gap, it provides critical stability so we can protect what matters most—teaching and learning.

Let me be clear: a culture of academic acceleration cannot exist where hunger persists. Nutrition is not a luxury; it is infrastructure for learning. When students are well fed, they are more focused, more engaged, and more prepared to succeed.

This legislation represents a smart, compassionate investment in Maryland's future. By committing \$10 million beginning in FY 2028, the State ensures we fully leverage federal resources while meeting the basic needs of our children.



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

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When we remove hunger from the equation, we give every child a fair chance to thrive.

Prince George's County Public Schools respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 704.

Sincerely,

Dr. Charoscar Coleman
Chief Operating Officer
Prince George's County Public Schools