



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

Lowe House Office Building, 6 Bladen Street, Room 200 · Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Phone 410-841-3374 | 301-858-3374 · 800-492-7122 Ext. 3374 · Fax 410-841-3342 | 301-858-3342
latino.caucus@house.state.md.us · www.mdlatinocaucus.org

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TO: Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins, Chair
Delegate Jessica Feldmark, Vice Chair
Ways and Means Committee Members
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus
DATE: 2/18/2026
RE: HB0704 - Community Eligibility Provision Expansion
Program - Establishment

The MLLC supports HB0704 - Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program - Establishment

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB0704.

One in eight children in Maryland face hunger on a daily basis, which adds up to more than 164,000 children across the state.¹ Latino families in particular are more likely to live in “food swamps,” meaning that they are more likely to face food insecurity and consume unhealthy foods.² About 33% of Latino/Hispanic middle school students face food insecurity and about 38% of Latino/Hispanic high school students face food insecurity.³ Also, Federal cuts to core safety net programs strip away resources that keep many families afloat and are further pushing Latino students into food insecurity. Moreover, eligible Latino families are already more reluctant to participate in these programs due to growing immigration pressures causing a general fear of interaction with the federal system.

This bill would require the Maryland State Department of Education to administer the program in a way which focuses on equitable distribution, emphasizing free school meals to schools with high concentrations of poverty. The Community Eligibility Program (CEP) already reaches about 370,000 Maryland students and 670 schools and students of all CEP participating schools are three times less likely to experience food insecurity.⁴ Thus, by expanding this program, the disproportionate number of Latino/Hispanic students in Maryland who face food insecurity would be better cared for.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB0704.

¹ [What Hunger Looks Like in Maryland](#)

² [How Universal Free School Meals Can Help Latino Kids - Salud America](#)

³ Ibid

⁴ [Gross, S.M., et al. \(2019\). 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.](#)