



**Senate Bill 586: Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program - Establishment  
Budget & Tax and Education, Energy & Environment, February 25, 2026  
Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST serves as the backbone organization for the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools and MENTOR MD | DC. The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) advocates for adequate funding, equitable policies, and transparent accountability statewide.

MOST, MD4CS, MENTOR MD|DC & MEC enthusiastically support Senate Bill 586 to support expanding the use of community eligibility where appropriate in Maryland. Community Eligibility has several key benefits for students and school districts. In areas where poverty is widespread or concentrated, Community Eligibility removes the stigma of being categorized as a “FARM” student. It eliminates out-of-pocket costs for families who are already struggling. Removing these concerns will make families more food-secure and allow students to focus on their academics. Expanding Community Eligibility will also make it easier for after-school programs to offer snacks and supper. It also removes the challenges of collecting individual FARM data for school districts, improves food access equity, and enables districts to implement innovative delivery models. Passing this bill will also send a message to Congress that states like Maryland are committed to community eligibility— a critical tone to strike in the current climate.

Federal cuts to SNAP and Medicaid threaten to reduce the number of students who qualify for direct certification for free school meals. This, in turn, could push some schools and districts below the minimum eligibility threshold for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and further weaken already-insufficient federal reimbursements that schools rely on to operate meal programs. Creating a \$10 million state CEP supplement fund, as proposed in this bill, would help make CEP financially viable for more Maryland schools—and help stabilize existing CEP schools that could see reimbursement declines due to the impacts of H.R. 1.

With the cost of living rising and more families struggling to meet basic needs, expanding CEP in Maryland is essential to ensuring students have consistent access to meals. SB 586 is an important step toward reducing hunger, improving student health and academic outcomes, and easing financial strain on families. We applaud Senator Gazzone for sponsoring this bill and urge a favorable report for SB586.

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