
**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 828
Summer Meals Waiver Act**

**Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
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MSEA President**

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 828, an emergency bill that requires the Maryland State Department of Education to submit Summer Food Service Program waiver requests to the United States Department of Agriculture.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Educators know all too well that, for far too many of our students, the only source of a nutritious meal they might have access to in a day is at their school. Few things are more gut wrenching to educators than seeing their students suffer, particularly for the want of the sufficient amount of food their growing bodies need to survive and thrive. Hungry children experience real and lasting health impacts that can put their physical, mental and cognitive development at risk as well as their social-emotional functioning. These impacts lead to deleterious effects such as poorer academic and behavioral outcomes for the children in our schools. Hungry children cannot be expected to fully engage in their learning if their attention is rapt by the rumbling and discomfort in their empty bellies.

According to Maryland Hunger Solutions¹, during the 2018– 2019 school year, over 333,000 students in Maryland were eligible to receive free school meals, and over 51,000 were eligible to receive school meals at a reduced price. These students are even more at risk for hunger insecurity during the summer when school isn't in session to provide a hot, nutritious breakfast and lunch. The Summer Food Service Program seeks to fill this gap and allows schools, camps, churches, and community centers the opportunity to feed children with nutritious meals. This program is federally funded and administered by the State. Unfortunately, in 2018 the USDA rescinded some waivers that gave feeding sites in Maryland flexibility on how to administer the program and MSDE did not reapply on behalf of those sites. This bill would require MSDE to reapply for those waivers and help to make school meals accessible to children in need across the state.

¹ <https://live-mdhungersolutions.pantheonsite.io/pdf/School-Meal-Charge-Policies-Maryland.pdf> (Accessed on February 16, 2020)



Senate Bill 828 will not impose a cost to the state but will allow more of Maryland's children to have access to meals in the summer. Maryland has made great strides in reducing food insecurity among children, but the loss of these waivers takes us two steps back.

The State must do whatever practicable to make feeding children easier and this bill is a small but meaningful effort toward that goal. **We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 828.**