



**Testimony in Support of HB1145**  
**Maryland Meals for Achievement Fund – Establishment**  
**Friday, February 28, 2020**

TO: The Honorable Anne Kaiser, Chair, The Honorable Alonzo Washington, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Laura E. Irwin, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board supports HB1145, which would establish a nonlapsing Maryland Meals for Achievement Fund and would require the Comptroller to distribute taxes collected from snack food sales to the Fund. Our board has been a longtime advocate for policies such as Earned Income Tax Credits and work supports, which help residents move towards self-sufficiency. We strongly support food and nutrition programs because they address a critical need, allowing them to utilize income for other necessities such as housing and childcare.

As advocates for the low-income residents of Montgomery County, our board recognizes that food insecurity continues to be a serious problem. Over 70,000 County residents are food insecure and 35% of these individuals are ineligible for Federal food assistance.<sup>1</sup> Within Montgomery County Public Schools, over 33% of students qualify for Free and Reduced Meals, with the vast majority of these children qualifying for free meals.<sup>2</sup> As the governing body for the Community Action Agency, we are proud of the Takoma-East Silver Spring (TESS) Community Action Center, which directly addresses food insecurity by serving as a summer meals walk-in site and participating in the Groceries to Go Program for seniors. The agency also addresses this important issue by participating in the County's Food Council and by overseeing food and nutrition contracts at County nonprofits, including Manna Food Center, Crossroads Community Food Network, Kids in Need Distributors, Women Who Care Ministries, Community Health and Empowerment through Education and Research (CHEER), Catholic Charities, and the Caribbean Help Center.

Food and nutrition programs are especially important in an expensive area like Montgomery County where the cost of living is so high. The Self-Sufficiency Standard for a single adult with one infant and one preschooler in Montgomery County is over \$103,000 – nearly four times the amount one would earn at the County's minimum wage.<sup>3</sup> Programs such as Maryland Meals for Achievement provide critical support to families by supporting school meals and the in-classroom breakfast program. Added funding will help to reduce food insecurity in Maryland and help children to achieve more academic success.

We strongly recommend passage of HB1145 and we encourage the Committee to consider other policies that support children and families and increase self-sufficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://mocofoodcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/moco\\_food\\_plan.pdf](https://mocofoodcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/moco_food_plan.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/pages/school-community-nutrition/freereducedpricemealstatistics.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Maryland Self Sufficiency Standard <http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/>