

# Expanding Maryland Meals for Achievement Would Ensure More Students Get Enough to Eat

Given before the House Ways and Means Committee

## Position Statement in Support of House Bill 1145

Free breakfast offered at school is the only way many Maryland children whose families are struggling to make ends meet are able to get a healthy start to the day. Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) helps schools with 40 percent or more of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals by giving all students an adequate opportunity to eat a healthy breakfast. Eating breakfast is essential to helping children succeed in school which, in turn, helps Maryland's long-term economic success.<sup>i ii</sup> However, due to the limited funding, many schools that are eligible and apply to participate in the program are not able to. House Bill 1145 would ensure that there is funding each year for MMFA to reach more students who need breakfast. For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports House Bill 1145.

In the traditional school breakfast program model, breakfast is served before the start of the school day. However, due to transportation issues such as school bus routes and family schedules, many students do not arrive at school in time to eat breakfast before the first bell. As a result, those students will stay hungry for the rest of the morning despite having access to free breakfast at their school.

Low-income students may also face stigma when participating in the free breakfast program, which may deter them from getting the food and nutrition they need. Maryland Meals for Achievement has helped alleviate both of these issues by providing all students access to breakfast free of charge after the first bell so that more of them can start the day off right.

During this current school year, 522 schools currently participate in the MMFA; an increase of 28 additional schools from the previous school year.<sup>iii</sup> However, there are 618 public schools in Maryland that qualify for the program, excluding schools that are able to provide free school meals to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision. Maryland should continue to increase funding for this program so that more qualifying schools can participate and serve more students.

Ensuring that students who need it have access to healthy meals at school is an effective way for Maryland to help struggling families make ends meet. Providing funding for more eligible schools to participate in Maryland Meals for Achievement program would feed more students, meaning Maryland is putting education at the forefront. Studies show that students who regularly eat breakfast have better academic performance and fewer behavioral problems, which ultimately helps ensure that students stay in school and earn the diplomas they need to go onto higher education or enter the workforce. Maryland is especially dependent on skilled and highly educated workers, so it is essential we're doing everything we can to ensure the success of the next generation of our workforce.

**For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Ways and Means Committee give a favorable report to House Bill 1145.**

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## **Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 1145**

### *Bill summary*

House Bill 1145 would ensure that revenue from certain sales and tax revenues from snack foods are designated to the Maryland Meals for Achievement Fund. The bill requires the Department of Education to use the fund to increase the number of students currently served under the Maryland Meals for Achievement Program. The bill also indicates that revenue for this bill is supplemental to any other funding that is currently appropriated for the program under the state budget. If approved, House Bill 1145 would feed more students in need.

### *Background*

The Maryland Meals for Achievement program provides breakfast in the classroom for all students at no cost to their families. A school is eligible when at least 40 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. During this current school year, 522 schools currently participate in the program; an increase of 28 schools from the previous school year. However, there are 618 public schools in Maryland that qualify for the program, excluding schools that are able to provide free school meals to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision. Despite having access to free breakfast, many students cannot arrive to school in time to eat breakfast and those students will stay hungry for the rest of the morning. Schools that have been able to participate in the program have reported significantly higher participation in their breakfast program. As a result, these schools have seen improvement in student attendance as well as improvement in student behavior. Maryland should continue to ensure increase funding for this program so that more qualifying schools can participate and serve more students.

### *Equity Implications*

Due to transportation issues such as school bus routes and family schedules, many students do not arrive at school in time to eat breakfast before the first bell. Additionally, low-income students may also face stigma when participating in the free breakfast program, which may deter them from getting the food and nutrition they need. When kids forgo eating breakfast, they remain hungry for the remainder of the morning and this can directly impact their academic and behavior performance. Data show that students of color benefit the most from school meal programs. Maryland ensuring that students who need it have access to meals at school is an effective way to help struggling Marylanders make ends meet.

### *Impact*

House Bill 1145 would likely **improve racial and economic equity** in Maryland.

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<sup>i</sup> Levin, Madeleine. "Breakfast Sessions." *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* 47 (2011): 117-19. *Food Research and Action Center*. Web.

<sup>ii</sup> "Academic Achievement and Health." *Health and Academic Achievement*. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Web.

<sup>iii</sup> Maryland Hunger Solutions. Maryland Meals for Achievement. Accessed February 2020. <https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/federal-nutrition-programs/school-breakfast-program-sbp/maryland-meals-for-achievement/>