



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1152

Public Schools – Student Meal Programs and Policies

Ways and Means Committee

March 4, 2020

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Margo Quinlan, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

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Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports HB 1152, which requires each school to strengthen communications with households regarding low balances in order to prevent school meal debt from accruing, as well as prohibits schools from responding to school meal debt in any way that overtly identifies or stigmatized the student in any way.

In Maryland, nearly one in five children come from food insecure households, meaning they do not have consistent and reliable access to adequate food.¹ The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program, along with other key state and federally funded child nutrition programs, help to address this nutrition gap by providing nutritionally sound meals to low-income students at low or no cost. Many Maryland families rely on these school meals to ensure that their children are well fed while they are away from home and not distracted by hunger during the school day.

During the 2018-2019 school year, the school meal programs served a combined total of over 116 million meals to Maryland students. Unfortunately, there are cases during the year when students may show up to the cafeteria without the money in their account or in hand to purchase their meal. While this can occur for a variety of reasons, it is never the fault of that child and as such, that child should never be forced to shoulder the consequences of the resulting debt.

HB 1152 aims to ensure that the repercussions of school meal debt are dealt with by the adults involved and never the students. School meal debt is a complex issue that will ultimately require a complex solution involving increased support and investment in school food authorities. However, by strengthening communication between school and households, HB 1152 aims to take a first step towards this solution by ensuring that districts are enacting strong policies, and protecting Maryland children from experiencing shame and stigma during this process.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges a favorable report for HB 1152.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

¹ Feeding America. (2015). Map the Meal Gap. http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/?_ga=1.119040777.1641925123.1423756865