

**Maryland House of Delegates  
Ways and Means Committee  
Public Schools - Student Meal Programs and Policies – HB 1152  
March 3, 2020 - SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the Montgomery County Council of PTA's (MCCPTA) for the 2020 legislative session. MCCPTA represents over 30,000 members from over 200 school communities. MCCPTA supports HB1152, Student Meal Programs and Policies. This bill will ensure that while children are in school, they are properly nourished both in mind and body. A hungry and humiliated child cannot learn to their potential.

Specifically, this bill requires a public school to notify a parent or legal guardian when there is a low balance and it also requires a school to notify them about the eligibility and applications process for FARMS (Free and Reduced Prices Meals.) It forbids a public school from communicating about unpaid meal debt directly with a student, or in a manner that humiliates, embarrasses, or stigmatizes the student. This includes practices that identify a student to his classmates such as wearing a wristband, stamp, sticker, given a print-out in the school line, or by receiving a special meal reserved for students with debt. A school would also be forbidden from punishing the child by requiring chores, or tasks. Public schools would also be prohibited from denying students a meal, school records, or access to school related activities.

13 states across the country have statewide meal charge policies that address meal shaming. Unfortunately, Maryland is not one of them. One of MCCPTA's core values is that we value each child for exactly who they are. Shaming children does not show that we value them as equal to their peers. School should be a "safe place" for all children. I have heard stories of students that would rather avoid a lunch line and skip lunch entirely, rather than being shamed in front of their peers. The Maryland Cares for Kids Act of 2018 was a step in the right direction; this bill will protect the children who are not covered by FARMS from unneeded humiliation. Especially in Montgomery County, because of the recent federal climate, many immigrant families do not feel safe to fill out the required forms to receive meals. This leaves many more students vulnerable to meal debt. Some PTA's pay for debt, but not all can afford to do this for their schools.

I would like to end my testimony with a personal story. When my 9<sup>th</sup> grade child was in first grade, I was the "bad mom" who had inadvertently let his lunch account go into negative balance. My child came home that day looking upset, saying "Mom, all I got for lunch was a cold cheese sandwich, I am hungry!!" Then he gave me a pink slip that showed the few dollars of unpaid balance. I gave him a hug, and let him know that was the last time he'd get the "sandwich of shame." Not all families can make the same promise, because they are truly financially strapped. Imagine being the child that has to be singled out on a regular basis. We have a chance to stop that today.

**MCCPTA recommends a favorable report on HB1152.**

Respectfully,

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