



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM (CIF) OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE IN
SUPPORT OF SB 971
CONCENTRATION OF POVERTY SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM – SCHOOL LUNCH
ON MARCH 15, 2022**

FAVORABLE

CIF is a coalition of three synagogues in Montgomery County, Kol Shalom, Adat Shalom, and Temple Beth Ami, with over 1750 households. CIF serves as a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on issues that relate to the sanctity and primacy of human life. CIF provides this testimony in support of SB 971, which would provide State funding for free breakfasts and lunches in Maryland schools.

CIF recognizes that even before the COVID pandemic, there were a large number of families, particularly families of color, that struggled with food insecurity. The pandemic only increased the number of families struggling with covering basic human needs, such as food. According to the FRAC dashboard of December 2021 (based on the USDA Household Pulse Survey), 10.8% of Black households and 23% of Latinx households in Maryland were food insufficient. Recent inflation and rising food costs have been particularly challenging for families with limited incomes. Research shows that hungry children do not learn as well as children who are well nourished, and hunger also affects their physical and emotional well-being. Food Research and Action Center (2021), "School Meals are Essential for Student Health and Learning," available at <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning.pdf>.

SB 971 would ensure that all schools that receive a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program provide free breakfast and lunch to all their students. The bill thus builds off the important investments made in the 2019 BluePrint Bill for Maryland's Future by supporting equity in the classroom and making sure that every child has the nutrition he or she needs in order to excel. Further, HB 857 would ensure that through the 2022-2023 school year, all students in Maryland's schools would continue to receive free breakfast and lunch, as occurred during the past two years as a result of the Department of Agriculture waivers. Offering universal free meals not only assures that each child has a minimum level of nourishment, but also removes the stigma associated with means-tested school meals programs, opens the program to families not currently eligible due to the low-income cutoff, and eliminates administrative burdens for schools.

CIF requests a favorable report on SB 971.

