

Senator Young
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Budget and Taxation
Maryland General Assembly - 2022 Session

RE: SB0971- HB0857

Greetings,

My name is Shaquintay Johnson. I am testifying in favor of providing free lunch to all students at a school receiving the funds from the Concentration of Poverty Grant.

I am a former educator and attended schools within the state of Maryland's. During my many years teaching and tutoring in Maryland, the story of hungry students and struggling parents was overheard often.

As a student I witnessed the snatching of lunch trays to students who didn't have money or had a substantial amount of lunch debt. A hot meal being snatched away in place of a cold sandwich was never a fair trade off for the child needing energy to thrive in the next class period. Many school staff members kept loose bills and coins to try to help students who were facing lunch debt. Teachers kept snack drawers and cabinets to offer a bit of sustenance to the student who "forgot" their lunch or couldn't afford it. There were many students who suffered from shame and pride or didn't want to bring shame to their parents so they wouldn't accept help.

The 2020 Annie E. Case Foundation's KIDS COUNT Data Center reports that 12% of children in Maryland are living in poverty. For too long our systems have shamed and punished those who are impoverished. Impoverished families often struggle to consistently meet the basic needs of the household which can result in nutritional deficits that can impact school

performance (United Health Foundation, 2022). If the state would like to see an improvement within our schools feeding our children and removing the disesteem associated with school lunch debt is sure to have more positive impact as they grow and learn.

I implore you, please pass this bill and feed our children.

Sincerely,

Shaquintay Johnson

Full Citation:

America's Health Rankings analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture, Household Food Security in the United States Report, United Health Foundation, AmericasHealthRankings.org, Accessed 2022.