



MARYLAND

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 971

Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

Health, Education and Environmental Affairs Committee

March 15, 2022

No Kid Hungry Maryland is pleased to support SB 971 which would establish a mechanism to expand access to free school meals for Maryland K-12 students, while supporting school systems, students, and their families as they recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a campaign of national anti-hunger organization Share Our Strength, No Kid Hungry Maryland works with partners – lawmakers, educators, business leaders and nonprofits – to identify and eliminate the barriers that may prevent children and families from accessing healthy and nutritious meals. Passage of SB 971 represents an important step toward achieving our goal of providing children with healthy and nourishing meals.

1 in 6 children in Maryland were estimated to have faced hunger last year, undoing more than a decade of progress in ending childhood hunger. The hunger crisis is hitting communities of color the hardest, with Black and Latino families with children reporting food insecurity twice as often as white households. While the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken steps to support access to meals during the pandemic, including allowing schools to serve meals at no charge to all students, these measures are currently set to expire on June 30, 2022. This will mean the end of a critical nutritional resource for children and families as they continue to experience economic hardship.

Schools and essential nutrition service workers have proven themselves to be trusted community lifelines for students and families. SB 971 expands access to school meals by requiring schools receiving a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to provide school lunch at no cost for all of their students. This legislation builds off of the important investments made in the 2019 Blueprint Bill for Maryland's Future (Blueprint Bill) by supporting equity in the classroom and making sure every child has the nutrition they need to excel.

Aside from the immediate need to reduce child hunger, a body of evidence shows that adequate nutrition benefits child development, behavior, the ability to learn, and the creation of lifelong healthy habits. SB 971 will ensure that Maryland's K-12 students have the nutrition they need to learn and thrive.

SB 971 would improve access to nutritious meals, improve the school academic environment, and help address child hunger, particularly among low-income families. Therefore, we are pleased to support SB 971 and urge committee members to vote “yes” when this bill is before them. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact No Kid Hungry Maryland at aholmes@strength.org.

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