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SB559 – Maryland Meals for Achievement
Budget and Taxation Committee
Hearing Date 2/22/2023 at 1pm
Testimony of SUPPORT

Chair Guzzone and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Capital Area Food Bank, we offer our support for SB559 to increase the Maryland Meals for Achievement Appropriation to provide in-classroom breakfasts to more Maryland students.

The Capital Area Food Bank serves over 200,000 food insecure residents in the two largest counties in Maryland, Prince George's and Montgomery. Last year, we distributed over 23 million meals to Maryland clients through a partner network of over 180 nonprofit organizations and more than 150 direct distribution sites.

Each year, the Capital Area Food Bank releases a Hunger Report – a comprehensive study that looks at food insecurity across the food bank's service area. One key finding from our 2022 Hunger Report was that Households with children are twice as likely to be affected by food insecurity. Survey results revealed that 49% of all households with children across the region experienced food insecurity at some point during the last year, as opposed to only 25% of households without children.

Households with young people have long been overrepresented among those served by the food bank. For parents and grandparents raising children and young adults in a region with a high cost of living, budgets can easily become stretched, and data tell us that when resources are tight, food is frequently one of the first things to be cut back.

That's why the food bank operates out-of-school and summer meal distributions, to help support families in getting the meals and groceries they need to thrive. However, we also know many of the families we serve rely on in-school meals, including in-classroom breakfasts, as a reliable, healthy source of food for their children.

The Maryland Meals for Achievement program is a successful state program that allows high-poverty schools to provide free in-classroom breakfast to all students. Over 600 schools currently participate in the program. However, approximately three hundred additional high-poverty schools are eligible, but unable to participate in MMFA due to insufficient funding. This means students from low-income households are going without the meals they need to focus on their education, maintain healthy happy lifestyles, and support their overall well-being.

This bill will increase the MMFA appropriation by \$4.5 million, allowing for **all** eligible schools to participate in the program. Maryland must support students in ensuring they have the foods they need to thrive, especially the most important meal of the day – school breakfast. We strongly encourage a favorable report on SB559, and welcome any questions from the committee. Thank you.