



FEBRUARY 25, 2015

Position Statement Supporting Senate Bill 334

Given before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

A successful economy starts at the schoolhouse, and successful students start with eliminating hunger. Community Eligibility Provision leverages federal dollars to do just that.

The Hunger-Free Schools Act of 2015 would increase federal dollars to high-poverty schools to feed children. Senate Bill 334 increases access to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) which provides access to healthy school meals, improves learning and reduces food insecurity. Schools can implement community eligibility without fear of losing State Compensatory Education funding.

We know that hungry kids do not make the best students. When a child is hungry, they have trouble with memory and maintaining attention, they have lower test scores and higher rates of absenteeism.¹ These students are not prepared to learn and their long-term success is diminished. CEP can easily solve these problems. In schools where CEP is implemented, administrators report success after success. States like Illinois, Kentucky, and Virginia have all touted the benefits they've witnessed in their students.

Here in Maryland, Somerset County became the first public school system to implement CEP district wide and Washington County has 12 participating schools. CEP also helps schools and school districts streamline their operations and reduce paperwork. When more children eat, the per-meal cost decreases. Less paperwork frees up resources to invest in improving meal quality and increases staff time available for other educational priorities. School districts across the country have implemented CEP without losing federal funding or operating in a deficit

Families in Maryland are still having a difficult time making ends meet. The community eligibility provision frees up families' budgets by using federal dollars to pay for their child's/children's breakfast and lunch. Families can use that money for food at home, housing, or emergency expenses. A family's budget could see significant savings over the course of a school year when CEP is implemented. In high poverty areas like Baltimore City, CEP could have reimbursed families with \$4.2 million in federal dollars for lunch alone.² Those dollars could have been spent to help a family keep their home, keep the car running, or pay for childcare-giving parents the ability to continue working. The community eligibility provision supports both children and their families.

Maryland is a great place for business, contrary to the popular misperception, and our highly educated and skilled workforce play a major role in attracting new corporations to the state. When we do not invest in our children's health and educational attainment, we work against our interests in the long-run. We cannot hope to continue as a leader in the nation's education system and workforce when we choose to leave kids hungry, unable to concentrate

¹ Center for Disease Control, "Health and Academic Achievement", 2014, http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf

² Maryland State Department of Education, Community Eligibility Study, 2014, as quoted by Robin Ziegler, Program Manager, School and Community Nutrition Programs

and learn. At no-cost to the state, CEP would continue to make the necessary investments so our workforce remains among the best in the country, inspiring new business to settle here and continued investment from established corporations.

Children cannot learn when they are hungry and Maryland has the chance to provide all children with the necessary nutrition to learn and achieve academic success. The Hunger-Free Schools Act of 2015 costs the state and schools nothing but the return is great. We have the chance to help our state succeed in the long-run by giving our future workforce the tools to succeed. In a time schools and children are seeing drastic proposals to cut funding, choose to support our education system. Choose to support the families and their children. Choose to support Maryland's future economy. It is for these reasons that the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully request that this committee report favorably on Senate Bill 334.