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Expanding the Free Lunch Program Would Feed More Children

Given before the House Ways and Means Committee

The Maryland Center on Economic Policy Supports House Bill 1360

Free breakfast offered at school is the only way many low-income Maryland children are able to get a healthy start to the day. However, logistical problems often make it difficult for these children to actually access the programs they need. Helping schools make sure all students are given an adequate opportunity to eat a healthy breakfast is essential to helping children succeed in school and, in turn, Maryland's long-term economic success.^{i ii} For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports House Bill 1360.

In the traditional school breakfast program model, breakfast is served before the start of the school day. However, due to transportation issues such as school bus routes and family schedules, many students do not arrive at school in time to eat breakfast before the first bell. Despite having access to free breakfast, many students cannot arrive to school in time to eat breakfast and those students will stay hungry for the rest of the morning.

Low-income students may also face stigma when participating in the free breakfast program, which may deter them from getting the food and nutrition they need. HB1360 would help alleviate both of these issues so that more students can start the day off right.

The proposed legislation recognizes that the needs of each school are different and allows each school district or school to find a model that best serves their students. In areas where students commute farther distances, a grab-and-go breakfast that students can take with them to class might be a better solution. For schools with high need, breakfast in the classroom or after first period may make more sense. Timing for breakfast would be decided by the school or district but should include opportunities for students to eat after the first bell.

Maryland can more effectively address the challenge of hunger that affects so many families if the programs already in place better fit students' needs. Better designed school meal programs would feed more school children, meaning Maryland is putting their education at the forefront. By keeping students nourished, they will have the more energy to succeed in the classroom. Studies show that students who regularly eat breakfast have better academic performance and fewer behavioral problems. Which ultimately helps ensure that they stay in school and earn the diplomas

they need to go onto higher education or enter the workforce. Maryland is especially dependent on skilled and highly educated workers, and this will help Maryland's economy grow.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Ways and Means Committee give a favorable report to House Bill 1360.

i Levin, Madeleine. "Breakfast Sessions." *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* 47 (2011): 117-19. *Food Research and Action Center*. Web.

ii "Academic Achievement and Health." *Health and Academic Achievement*. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Web.