

MD Meals for Achievement “Grab and Go” Breakfasts Could Feed 90,000 Students

Given before the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

Position Statement in Support of Senate Bill 359

Free breakfast offered at school is the only way many Maryland children whose families are struggling to make ends meet 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 Senate Bill 359.

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. Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) has helped alleviate both of these issues so that more students can start the day off right.

Although MMFA currently benefits over 230,000 students in 426 schools, only 24% of eligible high schools participate in the program, due in part to the logistical difficulties associated with meeting the requirement that breakfast be served in the classroom. The proposed legislation would allow high schools to offer a “Grab and Go” breakfast, still served after the first bell to ensure that students who are unable to arrive early are not excluded. This change would make MMFA more accessible for the 93 high-poverty high schools that are eligible for the program, serving 90,000 additional students.

Maryland can more effectively help families who can’t afford enough food if the anti-hunger programs already in place better fit students’ and schools’ needs. Better designed school meal programs would feed more students, meaning Maryland is putting their education at the forefront. 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, so it is essential we're doing everything we can to ensure the success of the next generation of our workforce.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee give a favorable report to Senate Bill 359.

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.