

February 13, 2013

Dr. Lillian Lowery
Superintendent
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

RE: Community Eligibility Application

Dear Superintendent Lowery,

Maryland Hunger Solutions, a state-wide anti-hunger advocacy organization and core advisor to the Maryland Partnership to End Childhood Hunger, and other valued partners in the effort to end hunger and poverty commend the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), under your leadership, for submitting an intent to apply for the Community Eligibility option to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and strongly encourage you to continue the application process as the deadline for Maryland to apply for this option for the 2013-2014 school year is **March 1, 2013**. This opportunity could bring significant benefits to many school districts and families around the state.

As you know, Community Eligibility is the newest tool for schools with high percentages of low-income students to provide meals at no charge to all students. Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, Community Eligibility will be an available option in each state. However, states can apply to be an early adopter for the 2013-2014 school year (four states will be chosen). The following states are already taking advantage of this program option: District of Columbia, Kentucky, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio and West Virginia. Community Eligibility allows schools to reduce paperwork and administrative costs, while increasing participation in the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program through streamlined meal service. The first three states to adopt the Community Eligibility Option all experienced significant increases in program participation.

In 2011, despite living in the wealthiest state in the country, 1 in 5 Maryland households with children had difficulty affording enough food to feed their family. Many Maryland families continue to struggle to make ends meet as the economy slowly recovers. The Community Eligibility option will also benefit families by reducing the amount of paperwork they must complete each school year and ensuring their children have access to healthy and nutritious meals at school at no cost, helping to stretch their limited household food budgets even farther.

As we continue to work together to achieve the Governor's goal of ending childhood hunger in Maryland by 2015, applying to be an early adopter of the Community Eligibility option is a strategic step that MSDE can take in making this goal more attainable while potentially bringing in more federal dollars

for the state. We appreciate you providing information to the LEAs about this option and helping them determine the potential benefits of this option for their jurisdiction. We respectfully urge you to apply to the USDA as an early adopter of the Community Eligibility option for the 2013-2014 school year.

Thank you for your consideration and being such a valuable partner in our work to end childhood hunger in Maryland. Please contact Cathy Demeroto at Maryland Hunger Solutions at 410-528-0021 or cdemeroto@mdhungersolutions.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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Cc: The Honorable Martin O'Malley, Governor

Secretary T. Eloise Foster, Maryland Department of Budget and Management