

October 3, 2016

Dear Governor Larry Hogan,

The Maryland Partnership to End Childhood Hunger is a coalition that works to create a state where all children are food secure, with reliable access to the nutritious food required to thrive throughout their lives. As part of our work, we annually submit a letter to the Governor of Maryland outlining what we believe are important budget priorities to address child hunger in our state.

Maryland has made important strides in ending child hunger. Last year, Governor Hogan signed *The Hunger-Free Schools Act of 2015*, a bill that passed the legislature unanimously, to encourage the utilization of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). As a result, more than 97,000 students in our state are now attending Hunger-Free Schools. In addition, the Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) program is an unquestioned success, providing funding for breakfast in the classroom for more than 230,000 students in low-income schools.

In spite of the progress that we have made, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, calculates that 12.5%, or 1 in 8 people in Maryland, are food insecure.<sup>1</sup> Marylanders that are food insecure may skip meals, eat less than they need, or even go hungry because they don't have reliable access to the food they need to live a healthy life. Food insecurity has many negative health consequences for children including increased risk for developmental delays,<sup>2</sup> hospitalizations,<sup>3</sup> and behavioral problems.<sup>4</sup> Food insecurity also negatively impacts education: food insecure children are more likely to have difficulty getting along with their peers, have lower test scores, and are more likely to repeat a grade in school.<sup>5</sup>

To achieve the goal of food security for all children, we support efforts to ensure that an adequate amount of healthy food is both physically and economically accessible for all children in our state. As you develop the FY 2018 operating budget, we respectfully request that you prioritize funding for the following programs that reduce food insecurity for Maryland's youngest residents.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx#map>

<sup>2</sup> Rose-Jacobs, R., Black, M. M., Casey, P. H., Cook, J. T., Cutts, D. B., Chilton, M., & Frank, D. A. (2008). Household food insecurity: associations with at-risk infant and toddler development. *Pediatrics*, 121(1), 65-72.

<sup>3</sup> Casey, P.H. et al. (2004). *J Nutrition*. 134[6]:1432-1438.

<sup>4</sup> <http://mcsilver.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/Child%20Food%20Insecurity%20and%20Mental%20Health.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/toohungrytolearn\\_report.pdf](http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/toohungrytolearn_report.pdf)

## \$2.5 Million in State Funding To Eliminate the “Reduced-Price” School Meal Fees

Increasing access to **school meals** is a crucial part of our strategy to end child food insecurity.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the cost of school meals is a significant barrier for many families and students.<sup>7</sup> A single parent with one child cannot earn more than \$20,826 a year to qualify for free school meals and cannot earn more than \$29,637 to qualify for reduced-price meals.<sup>8</sup> However, most of the families in the “reduced-price” category (incomes between 130-185% Federal Poverty Line) are still struggling to make ends meet. With \$2.5 million in state funding, Maryland can eliminate the “reduced-price” school meal fees for more than 45,000 children with family incomes between 130% and 185% of the Federal Poverty Line.<sup>9</sup> This investment will be a strong support to school systems all over the state, and a real benefit for low-income families with children.

## \$500,000 Annually In the Maryland Market Money Initiative to Support Local Farmers and Reduce Food Insecurity

**Farmer’s markets** are important resources that benefit both local residents and farmers. We support the statewide program that offers financial incentives for using federal nutrition assistance benefits (including WIC and SNAP/FSP) to access healthy food at Maryland farmers markets. We urge your support for the successful pilot program, Maryland Market Money, which improves nutrition, keeps federal benefit dollars in the local economy, and supports local agricultural producers.<sup>10</sup> Maryland Market Money supports local farmers and reduces food insecurity by matching the federal nutrition benefits redeemed at local markets.

## An Additional \$4.9 Million for Maryland Meals For Achievement

**Maryland Meals for Achievement** (MMFA) is a successful state program that allows high-poverty schools to provide universal free breakfast in classroom. In Maryland’s public schools, just 27% of students participate in school breakfast.<sup>11</sup> However, in MMFA schools; school breakfast participation dramatically increases, with about 66% of students participating in school breakfast.<sup>11</sup> Studies have also shown that students at MMFA schools demonstrate enhanced educational performance, improved health; and a reduction in behavioral issues.<sup>12</sup> In addition, every dollar of state MMFA funding leverages \$5.46 in federal reimbursements.

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<sup>6</sup> Kabbani, N.S. & Kmeid, M.Y. (2005). The role of food assistance in helping food insecure households escape hunger. Review of Agricultural Economics, 27, 439-445.

<sup>7</sup> Arteaga, I. & Heflin, C. (2014). Participation in the National School Lunch Program and food insecurity: An analysis of transitions into kindergarten. Children and Youth Services Review, 47, 224-230.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/income-eligibility-guidelines>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/msde/programs/schoolnutrition/docs/Free+and+Reduced-Price+Meal+Data.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.marylandfma.org/programs/maryland-market-money-2/>

<sup>11</sup> Source: MSDE

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED460784.pdf>.

With \$6.9 million in funding, MMFA currently benefits over 230,000 students in 462 schools.<sup>13</sup> However, the current funding only allows for 54% of eligible schools to participate in MMFA. An additional \$4.9 million in the Maryland State Department of Education's Aid to Education Budget for the Maryland Meals for Achievement program will allow all eligible high-poverty schools to participate in the program.

The Partnership also requests your support for a change in the MMFA regulations to better meet the needs of high schools. Only 24% of MMFA-eligible high schools are currently benefiting from this program due to both the aforementioned insufficient funding for the program and the requirement that food be both *served and eaten* in the classroom. While delivering breakfast directly to classrooms works well in elementary schools, high schools should be permitted to offer breakfast on "Grab and Go" carts for greater efficiency and to accommodate increased choice for teenage students. An additional \$2.7 million is needed to fund all MMFA-eligible high schools.

#### \$4 Million in Funding For a State Supplement to Raise the Minimum Monthly FSP Benefit

**The Food Supplement Program** (FSP/SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) is a critical safety net program that has been proven to significantly reduce food insecurity.<sup>14</sup> In Maryland, about 10% of all FSP recipients are seniors and over 41% are children.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, many Maryland residents who are FSP-eligible are not enrolled.<sup>16</sup> One reason is the insufficient minimum benefit of just \$16 a month. The 2016 General Assembly passed a state supplement to raise the minimum monthly benefit to \$30 per month. However, this supplement is only available to the more than 18,000 Marylanders age 62 and above. With \$4 million in funding, a state supplement will raise the minimum monthly FSP benefit to no less than \$30 a month for *all* Marylanders, regardless of age. More than 26,000 additional households will benefit from this supplement. A smart investment - every dollar in FSP/SNAP benefits generates \$1.70 in local economic activity.

In addition to the priorities outlined above, the Maryland Partnership to End Childhood Hunger also urges your support for the following initiatives that work to reduce poverty and food insecurity.

- Expand Maryland's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a successful anti-poverty intervention, to include younger workers.
- Expand pre-kindergarten to a universal model.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/schoolnutrition/meals\\_achieve.htm](http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/schoolnutrition/meals_achieve.htm)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Measuring2013.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Source: Department of Legislative Services, September 17, 2015

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.mdhungersolutions.org/pdf/snap-percent-eligible-but-not-receiving-2015.pdf>

- Allow all workers the opportunity to earn paid sick leave, because the lack of paid leave contributes to the cycle of poverty and hunger.
- Ensure that a sufficient quantity of affordable housing is available in communities across the state, because we know that food insecurity and housing insecurity often occur simultaneously.
- Increase the minimum wage so that more Marylanders can earn a living wage and provide for their family's basic needs.
- As a critical component of the social safety net, we support the provision of adequate disability benefits for Maryland residents that are unable to work.

We look forward to meeting with you to discuss these priorities in further detail and thank you for your partnership, support, and tireless efforts on behalf of the most vulnerable Marylanders.

Sincerely,