



# Maryland Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger and promoting well-being

## Testimony on Poverty in Maryland

### House Appropriations Committee

January 30, 2015

*Maryland Hunger Solutions is an organizational member of the Maryland Alliance for the Poor.*

My name is Michael J. Wilson and I am the Director of Maryland Hunger Solutions. Maryland Hunger Solutions works to end hunger in the state of Maryland. We are proud to join with our colleagues in the Maryland Alliance for the Poor to present before this distinguished committee today.

There are many charitable efforts in the state of Maryland to address hunger; there are food banks, food pantries, and numerous voluntary undertakings. Yet as important as these efforts are, they are a piecemeal approach to a much larger challenge. There are more than 1- in -8 households in Maryland that struggle with hunger, and every one of these efforts is important. But they're not enough. For the more than 800,000 Marylanders, half of whom are children and seniors, who rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program— more commonly known as food stamps and officially known as the Food Supplement Program in Maryland—state and federal programs are indispensable.

One of the most important state programs is Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA). As many of you know, MMFA is a state-funded program that expands access to universal, free Breakfast in the Classroom in schools where at least 40% of students are eligible for free and reduced priced meals. MMFA is also a great investment for Maryland; for every 1\$ in state funding, the state brings in **\$5.46** in federal funding. MMFA lets us leverage federal dollars at a more than 5 – 1 ratio to feed breakfast to poor kids in schools, and we already know that kids who eat breakfast are better students, have better attendance, exhibit better behavior at school, and are less likely to be overweight.

The Governor's budget flat-lined MMFA for the next year, meaning that while 462 schools are able to participate, hundreds more applied but were unable to participate due to lack of funding. For those kids, there is no "wait until next year". There is either breakfast or there isn't. We strongly urge support for MMFA without additional cuts.

Fortunately, there is an additional option; the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP is part of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 which allows schools that predominantly serve low-income children to offer free, nutritious school meals to all students through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. In essence a school or a school district with a high percentage of free and reduced meals -- instead of distributing and collecting forms -- can utilize direct certification and be reimbursed for all meals.

For example, in Somerset County, Maryland, which implemented community eligibility last fall throughout the entire school district, every student eats breakfast and lunch without cost to the student; it is reimbursed entirely by USDA, saving the school district thousands of dollars. And, their lunch and breakfast participation has already skyrocketed over this same period last year.

Nationally, about half of all schools eligible for community eligibility have utilized it. Here in Maryland, that percentage is 6%. The reason is because the FARMS forms are also being used to calculate other educational programs – including compensatory education. We are working with the Maryland State Department of Education and legislators here in Annapolis to craft the Hunger Free Schools Act of 2015 which will hold schools and school districts harmless for the purpose of compensatory education funding, while utilizing the federal funding that is available through community eligibility.

Finally, as you are aware, there are a wide variety of programs to assist persons experiencing poverty. In fact, Maryland Hunger Solutions is authorized through the Department of Human Resources and the United States Department of Agriculture to sign up those who are eligible for the Food Supplement Program. But we cannot sign up those same persons for health care – even if they are eligible and we are essentially utilizing the same economic and personal information. We can't help them with housing or energy assistance or any of the myriad of programs that they may be eligible for, even though they are right there and we are helping them. This is why Delegate Rosenberg's legislation, H.B. 66, the Human Services No –Wrong Door Pilot program is critical. Enabling outreach organizations to respond to the needs of those in need of multiple services – and not just a single service – is a much more rational and efficient way to provide assistance.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and I would be glad to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael J. Wilson, Director  
**Maryland Hunger Solutions**

*Maryland Hunger Solutions is a state-wide organization working to end hunger, promote nutrition, and improve well-being for Marylanders in need through education, advocacy, outreach and collaboration. Maryland Hunger Solutions focuses on improving and increasing participation in federal nutrition programs to ensure that everyone has access to adequate healthy food every day.*