

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 756
The Breakfast After the Bell Act
Budget and Taxation Committee
March 15, 2016

Maryland Hunger Solutions urges your support of Senate Bill 756 – The Breakfast After the Bell Act. SB 756 will increase access to the School Breakfast Program by targeting one of the key barriers to participation—the timing that breakfast is served.

The National School Breakfast Program a critical tool in combatting childhood hunger, yet it fails to reach the majority of low-income students who need it most. The reason for this is simple; in many schools, breakfast is served in the cafeteria before the school day begins. As a result, many students miss out on school breakfast due to transportation issues like incompatible bus or family schedules as well as stigma.

Increasing access to school breakfast is the best strategy to ensure that students start their day well-nourished and ready to learn. Although most schools already offer breakfast, there are three significant barriers that result in low participation: the cost of the meal, the time that the meal is offered, and the stigma associated with school breakfast. As a result of these barriers, **less than half** of all low-income students in our state participate in the School Breakfast Program.¹

SB 756 will increase participation by moving breakfast after the bell—when kids have the best access to these meals. Serving breakfast after the first bell gives more students access to the critical nutrition they need, mitigating inequities and supporting academic success. Breakfast after the bell is a proven strategy to increase access to breakfast and therefore helps students learn, grow, and achieve to their highest potential.

Decades of research show that children who participate in school breakfast:

- are less likely to experience food insecurity (i.e. the lack of reliable access to the nutritious food needed to live a healthy life),
- are better able to learn and demonstrate improved academic performance,
- consume a healthier overall diet and are less likely to be overweight,
- exhibit better behavior at school, and
- are less likely to be late to or absent from school.²

¹ Source: Maryland State Department of Education school meal data for school year 2014-2015.

² Source: Food Research and Action Center, [Breakfast for Learning](http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/breakfastforlearning.pdf) (Available at <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/breakfastforlearning.pdf>) and [Breakfast for Health](http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/breakfastforhealth.pdf) (Available at <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/breakfastforhealth.pdf>).

SB 756 gives schools the flexibility they need to choose a model that works best for their students. Breakfast after the bell can take a variety of forms and this bill allows flexibility to determine what works best for each individual school. Schools can, for example, choose to serve breakfast in the classroom, implement grab and go stations - whereby students can grab healthy meals on the way to class, or offer a second chance to eat breakfast.

The data is clear – on an average school day, just 45% of low-income students in our state participate in school breakfast.¹ That means that more than 220,000 low-income students are missing out on the health and academic benefits of school breakfast. SB 756 offers the State an opportunity to make a real investment in the health and academic success of Maryland children this upcoming school year and for years to come.

Maryland Hunger Solutions **urges a favorable report** on Senate Bill 756.