

BILL: House Bill 287
TITLE: Hunger-Free Schools Act of 2017
DATE: February 9, 2017
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, supports House Bill 287.

MABE strongly supports this bill in order to extend through fiscal year 2022 the ability of local school systems to choose to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program which allows high-poverty schools to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students. There are currently 227 Hunger-Free Schools in Maryland, and this bill will allow the continued success of this much needed program.

Local Boards of education place a very high priority on providing school facilities, school meals, and programs of instruction designed to promote the physical and mental health and fitness of students and to prepare them to maintain a healthy lifestyle as adults. Federal and state standards for student health and fitness, especially regarding nutrition, continue to be reformed and enhanced to address the alarming national epidemics of juvenile diabetes and obesity.

At the same time, child hunger impacts far too many students as an obstacle to learning. School systems are increasingly involved in summer and weekend meal programs; partnerships to help ensure daily access to healthy food for all students. At the federal level, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization, entitled the "The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act", mandated major reforms in school meal programs to improve the nutritional value of the meals served to Maryland students each day.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act included the CEP program as an option for schools and school systems with very high percentages of low-income children to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students in the school. It is designed to increase participation by students in their school's meal programs, while also reducing administrative paperwork and personnel hours. Under the community eligibility program, schools are reimbursed through a formula based on the number of identified students, including student not identified through the traditional free and reduced meal application form.

MABE supported the initial legislation to authorize the CEP program in Maryland in 2015; and greatly appreciates the bill's preservation of local board of education and school system discretion to participate, in whole or in part, in the CEP program. MABE and local school systems are requesting amendments to remove the new reporting requirements included in this bill.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 287, with the amendments described above.