

BILL: House Bill 288
TITLE: State Department of Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Funding (Free School Meals for Students from Low- and Middle-Income Families Act)
DATE: February 9, 2017
POSITION: SUPPORT
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 288.

MABE recognizes the importance of developing healthy school environments, which includes providing high quality health and physical education programs as well as meeting the nutritional needs of students through school breakfasts, lunches, afterschool meals, and vending machine policies. Local boards support this legislation because it would provide additional state funding to ensure a universally free school meal program for more students.

Federal and state standards for school nutrition continue to be reformed and enhanced to address the national epidemics of juvenile diabetes and obesity. At the same time, child hunger and inequitable access to healthy meals impacts far too many students as an obstacle to learning. Therefore, the federal government is also engaged in promoting improvements in expanding access to high quality school meal programs.

The 2010 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. In response to federal reforms, and local needs, school systems are increasingly involved in summer and weekend meal programs; and partnerships to help ensure daily access to healthy food for all students. This 2010 law reauthorized six major nutrition programs, including school breakfast and lunch. Since 2010, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has promulgated or proposed numerous regulations and policies to implement the law.

Today, another reauthorization bill is due to be considered in Congress, and MABE will be advocating for additional federal funding and flexibility for local school systems to deliver healthy meals to all students. In this context, local boards would greatly appreciate additional state aid to enable the type of expanded school meal services envisioned by this bill.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 288.