

BILL: Senate Bill 740
TITLE: State Department of Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Funding (Maryland Cares for Kids Act)
DATE: March 7, 2018
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation Committee
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, supports Senate Bill 740.

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 by fully funding the student share of reduced-price breakfasts and lunches.

Local boards of education are joining advocates for ending childhood hunger and promoting the health and learning of students in strong support for this legislation. The funding provided by this legislation is needed to address the problem that many low-income students are not able to participate in the school meal programs because their household income is too high to qualify for free meals, yet too low to afford the reduced-price school meal co-pays. As a result, reduced-price eligible students are more likely to incur go without the regular meals they need; and 26% less likely to eat school meals compared to students that qualify for free school meals.

Federal and state standards for school nutrition have been 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. The federal law reauthorized six major nutrition programs, including school breakfast and lunch.

As future reauthorization bills are considered in Congress, 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 ensure the expanded school meal services made possible by this bill.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 740.