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Statement to the House Ways and Means and Appropriations Committee

Briefing on Education Issues Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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I am Martha James-Hassan, a member of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners, and MABE's President.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school closures and demand for system-wide distance learning has accentuated the need for educational equity, and to embrace the use of an equity lens in adopting policies and holding our selves accountable for educating each student.

Fortunately, our excellent school meals programs and staff rallied to meet the nutritional needs of all of our students, with a built-in emphasis on serving the students and families who need it most. By contrast, distance learning, especially access to the internet and devices at home, was not already supported by divisions of staff and targeted federal funding. This inequitable situation or "pre-existing condition" has required new and unbudgeted investments, community and home outreach, and professional development for teachers asked to do a job that neither college nor professional development ever prepared them for.

True educational equity for our students means having remote access to high quality teaching and learning, at least until it is safe for all students to return to classrooms. But educational equity also demands that we invest in the extra time and resources, whether online or in-person, to make up for the lost instruction that is unfairly burdening our "at promise" students. Achieving educational equity calls on us to stand firm on our funding commitments, and demand rigor in adhering to the equity policies that drive the programs and practices to meet our students' educational and social emotional needs in these deeply traumatic times.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future envisioned us being able to transform public education by allocating increased funding in much more equitable and empowering ways. This is the future we need to continue to work toward. Thank you for this opportunity to emphasize the critical role educational equity must have in transforming the lives of our students and our communities. This pandemic should be a "reason to" not a "reason not to" make the changes we know are needed.