

The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
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Written Statement Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland House Ways & Means Committee
 For the Hearing on
Hunger-Free Schools Act of 2017 (HB 287)
February 9, 2017

SUPPORT

The opinions expressed herein are our own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University.

We are researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, an interdisciplinary academic center based within the Bloomberg School of Public Health in the Department of Environmental Health and Engineering. The Center engages in research, policy analysis, and education activities guided by an ecologic perspective that diet, food production, the environment, and public health are interwoven elements of a complex system. The Center is currently funding and participating in a study to assess the impact of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) on Baltimore City Public School students. Recognizing the role that the CEP can play in promoting school breakfast and lunch participation, **we support House Bill No. 287 – Hunger-Free Schools Act of 2017**. This bill serves to protect Maryland schools that have elected to use federal funding for school meals available through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

CEP was established in the federal Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 and implemented in some states during the 2014-2015 academic year. CEP allows schools in high-poverty communities—those in which at least 40 percent of students are directly certified for free meals—to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students without collecting paper applications. The provision provides low-income students access to nutritious meals, eliminates the application process for parents, reduces the administrative burden on school staff and administrators, and increases the federal revenue for schools. While some of the program's impacts on Maryland students are still being studied, CEP may reduce the stigma associated with receiving free school meals, improve attendance and academic achievement among students, and increase food security rates among families with children in participating schools.

Nationwide, schools that have adopted CEP have increased the number of low-income students receiving healthy, federally funded meals and decreased tardiness rates. In the states that piloted CEP in 2014-2015, participation in school lunch rose by 13 percent and in school breakfast by 25 percent. Maryland State Department of Education data shows that since adopting CEP, lunch participation has risen 31 percent and tardiness has decreased 15 percent in Somerset County, Maryland; in Baltimore City, breakfast participation has risen 12 percent while lunch participation has risen 26 percent. Such increases in participation underscore the program's potential to improve low-income children's access to healthy meals at school.

With the increase in students receiving school breakfast and lunch, CEP may also help to improve household food insecurity rates. An ongoing study by the Center and the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health within the Bloomberg School of Public Health is assessing CEP's impact on rates of household food insecurity among Baltimore City Public School students. Reauthorizing and updating the Hunger-Free Schools Act of 2015 by passing HB 287 would help preserve CEP's demonstrated impact on school meal participation and increase the understanding of the program's impact on food security.

We applaud Del. Hixson for sponsoring HB 287. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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