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Breakfast Participation Remains Level among Maryland Students Maryland Hunger Solutions Highlights Strategies to Boost Participation

Baltimore – December 11, 2007 – Less than half of eligible Maryland low-income students (43 percent) received school breakfast during the 2006-07 school year, according to Kimberley Chin, director of Maryland Hunger Solutions. Based on data from the Food Research and Action Center's *School Breakfast Scorecard 2007*, Maryland could help 37,546 more low-income children start each day with a healthy morning meal and gain an additional \$7.9 million in federal funding if it could increase participation to reach the attainable level of 60 percent of eligible children. Maryland's current rate is below the national average.

"By increasing participation in school breakfast, we would improve nutrition, fight hunger, and pull in more available federal funding to the state," said Chin. "The School Breakfast Program exists to make sure all children have a nutritious morning meal. Maryland's children should not miss out on breakfast, especially when there is money available to help schools give children a healthy start to their day."

Numerous studies have demonstrated the links between breakfast and learning: Breakfast improves nutrition, prevents obesity, improves students' achievement, and reduces discipline problems in school. But, many families find it hard to provide a healthy and filling morning meal for their children, especially as they struggle with low wages, morning commutes and work schedules, as well as children's frequent inability to eat healthily when they first awake. As a result, many children miss out on breakfast.

"More children – and their parents – should be aware that programs like school breakfast are available. Our goal is to increase participation in these programs by raising awareness and by looking at ways we can make the school breakfast a vital part of the school day. For example, many Maryland schools have found success by serving breakfast in the classroom," Chin added. "We believe that a hunger-free Maryland is an attainable goal."

"We are working to make sure that more children participate in the School Breakfast Program, and we look forward to partnering with Maryland Hunger Solutions to reach this goal," said Robin E. Ziegler, School and Community Nutrition Programs Branch Chief at the Maryland Department of Education. "Children that start the day with breakfast are ready to learn, better behaved, and score higher on tests. We believe that it is important to make sure that children have access to all the tools at their disposal – including breakfast – that can help them learn."

About Maryland Hunger Solutions

Maryland Hunger Solutions is a new initiative headquartered in Baltimore that will work to reduce poverty and end hunger in Maryland. Its main strategy is to get tens of thousands more Marylanders, especially children, enrolled in available federal food programs, like the School Breakfast Program. The program is an initiative of the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and is modeled after FRAC's successful District of Columbia initiative – D.C. Hunger Solutions.

"We started Maryland Hunger Solutions as a way to attack hunger in the state, especially among children, and help the state pull in far more available federal funding to reach that goal," said Jim Weill, president

of the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). "A recent report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture shows that hunger is growing across the state of Maryland. Getting more children to participate in school breakfast is one significant way we can make sure that children have access to three healthy meals a day – and help the state access available federal money."

Nationally, participation in the School Breakfast Program grew to include 8.1 million low-income children during the 2006-2007 school year, an increase of 5 percent from the previous school year. While more children are starting the day with breakfast, the program is reaching less than half of eligible low-income children – only 45 low-income children ate breakfast for every 100 who ate lunch. If states met the participation goal of 60 low-income children eating breakfast for every 100 eating lunch, almost 2.6 million more children would have been eating a healthy school breakfast every day and states would have collected an additional \$555 million in child nutrition funding.

About the report: The full report, *School Breakfast Scorecard 2007*, is available at www.frac.org/pdf/SBP_2007.pdf. To measure the reach of the School Breakfast Program, FRAC compares the number of schools and low-income children that participate in breakfast to those that participate in the National School Lunch Program. FRAC sets a participation goal of reaching 60 children with breakfast for every 100 receiving lunch as a way to gauge state progress and the costs of underparticipation in the program.