



April 16, 2021

The Honorable Member of Congress
Senate/House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator/Representative,

We, the 34 undersigned Maryland and DC organizations and associations, write urging you to work with the Administration to include Healthy School Meals for All in the upcoming infrastructure bill. This would ensure that every child in the U.S. has access to a nutritious breakfast and lunch at school to support their academic success.

During the pandemic USDA has provided waivers to schools, allowing many of them to serve free school meals to all students. The ability to serve all students a nutritious meal, regardless of income should not be rolled-back as we begin to recover from the worst of the pandemic.

School meals reduce childhood hunger, decrease childhood overweight and obesity, improve child nutrition and wellness, enhance child development and school readiness, and support learning, attendance, and behavior. Recent studies reaffirm that access to nutritious meals in school increases the health and educational outcomes for our nation's children. Investing in these programs so that all children, regardless of income, can access healthy meals year-round would help ensure that every child is ready to learn and thrive.

The last year has shown us that the current system is not reaching every student who needs it. In fact, many students who need a nutritious breakfast and lunch at school do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals. For example, a family of four living on just \$50,000 per year is ineligible for this program. Additionally, there are stigma issues inherent to a tiered payment system, and students bear the brunt of the unpaid school meal debt facing families and schools.

While the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) reported that approximately 387,000 children, or 43 percent of Maryland students received free or reduced-price school meals prior to the March 2020 school closures, the economic strain of the pandemic has greatly increased the number of Marylanders experiencing food hardship.

As we move to recovery, we have the opportunity to ensure that all students are hunger-free and ready to learn. This year's infrastructure bill provides the perfect opportunity for Healthy School Meals for All Students. America's infrastructure does not just include roads and bridges; it also includes our food distribution system and how nutritious food gets to all those who need it. Additionally, free school meals for all improves our human infrastructure by ensuring that children receive the nutritious meals they need to thrive and supporting jobs and financial viability for school nutrition departments as we build a more equitable economy.

We represent local and state organizations that see firsthand the impact of poverty and food insecurity in our state. We also know how life changing free school meals for all could be for students, their families, schools, and communities.



Thank you for your leadership and we look forward to working with you to ensure that every child in this country receives the healthy food they need to learn and grow.

Sincerely,

Maryland Hunger Solutions
DC Hunger Solutions
Maryland Food Bank
Maryland State Education Association
Healthy School Food Maryland
Public Justice Center
Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Maryland Nonprofits
Montgomery County Food Council
Manna Food Center
Critical Issues Forum
Community Action Council of Howard County
Montgomery County Community Action Board
Baltimore Hunger Project
Talbot County Hunger Coalition
Queen Anne's County Public Schools
Takoma Park Silver Spring Food Co-op
Housing and Human Services of the City of Frederick
Homestead Hustle & Healing
Builders Inc/mfcc
Rainbow Community Development Center
Educational Sustainability Mobilization Inc DBA EssentialNow
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd
Small Things Matter
Hughes United Methodist Church
Milk Lady Farmers Markets
Veron Ventures
Greater Expectations Outreach Ministry
RESULTS Metro Maryland
University of Maryland Extension (Harford)
Oak Chapel UMC
Qiydaar Academy, Inc.
MidShore Meals til Monday