

[August 24, 2012]

Dr. Lillian Lowery
Superintendent
Maryland State Department of Education
301 West Baltimore
Baltimore, MD 21201

RE: FY 2014 MSDE Budget – Funding for Maryland Meals for Achievement

Dear Superintendent Lowery,

As you develop the FY 2014 Maryland State Department of Education - Aid to Education budget, we respectfully request that you invest an additional \$1.8 million to expand the Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) program. We further request that the Department and the Administration make a commitment to providing enough funds to serve the children in all eligible schools by fiscal year 2018.

As you know, MMFA is a national model for increasing access to the National School Breakfast Program, with proven links to improved educational performance, health and behavior.¹ It allows schools with at least 40 percent of students eligible for free or reduced price meals to provide universal, in-classroom breakfast. In MMFA schools, the average participation in school breakfast is close to 70 percent, which is significantly higher than school breakfast participation in non-MMFA schools. And increasing participation in school breakfast is a priority for the Governor's Partnership to End Childhood Hunger.

In the wealthiest state in the country - home to six of the most affluent jurisdictions nationwide - 1 in 6 Maryland households had difficulty affording enough food to feed their family in 2011.² At the same time, the USDA estimates that food costs will rise between 3.0-4.0% in 2013.³ While efforts are being made to improve our nation's economy, many Maryland families are still struggling to make ends meet. As access to food and good nutrition is critical for everyone's well-being, reliable sources of healthy meals - through programs like the School Breakfast Program - are more important than ever in Maryland.

The Maryland public school system has enjoyed the highest or one of the highest national rankings for the past several years. We believe that MMFA is a critical support system that contributes to long term success by ensuring students start the school day ready to learn. In a recent survey, a majority of Maryland teachers saw children who were regularly coming to school hungry, with 65% of teachers reporting that school breakfast was vital to academic achievement, and 71% reporting they had a positive experience with an in-classroom breakfast program.⁴ As such, the MMFA program is an incorporation of the best practices in education – providing healthy meals in the classroom to children who are often experiencing hunger.

Currently, 813 Maryland schools are eligible for MMFA, yet only 271 schools are funded at \$3,380,000 dollars.⁵ To fund the additional 542 schools eligible MMFA schools, it would cost an additional \$9,120,000 million dollars – bringing the total MMFA budget to \$12.5 million⁶ **We are requesting a multi-year budget commitment to fully fund the MMFA in all eligible schools over five years, starting with a short-term goal of funding 20% of the unmet need in the FY 2014 budget. This 20% expansion will require a \$1.8 million dollar increase in funding in FY 2014. If Maryland increases MMFA funding by \$1.8 million, 56,896 additional children will start the day with a nutritious in-classroom breakfast during the 2013-2014 school year. If we fully fund MMFA over five years, 284,479 more children will**

benefit from school breakfast by 2018.⁷ In addition, by increasing funding for MMFA, Maryland will benefit from significantly more federal dollars -- for every \$1.00 spent on MMFA, \$4.55 is received in federal reimbursement from the School Breakfast Program.⁸

We recognize that you must make many difficult decisions as you prepare your FY 2014 budget, and we commend MSDE for its leadership and support for MMFA in Governor O'Malley's FY 2013 budget. As Interim Superintendent Sadusky testified at MSDE's budget hearing in February 2012, "School breakfast is one key to our academic excellence in Maryland and will continue to play a role in our #1 national ranking."⁹

MMFA is only part of a statewide investment by community partners to help more eligible children have access to breakfast, but it is an important, proven and cost-effective one. **We respectfully request that you make increased funding for the Maryland Meals for Achievement program a top priority.**

Thank you for being a champion for Maryland's children and their families.

Very truly yours,

Cathy Demeroto

Director

Maryland Hunger Solutions

James D. Weill

President

Food Research and Action Center

Anne Sheridan

Director

Maryland No Kid Hungry Campaign

Billy Shore

Founder and Chief Executive Officer

Share Our Strength

Mark Furst

President and CEO

United Way of Central Maryland

Adam Schneider

Chair

Maryland Alliance for the Poor

Regan Vaughan

Chair

Welfare Advocates

Shelley Franklin

Director

Maryland Interfaith Legislative Committee

Betty Weller

President

Maryland State Education Association

Deborah Flateman

Chief Executive Officer

Maryland Food Bank

Lynn Brantley

President and CEO

Capital Area Food Bank

Minerva Delgado

Executive Director

Manna Food Center

Ellie Mitchell

Executive Director

Maryland Out of School Time Network

Robin McKinney

Director

Maryland Cash Campaign

Rebecca Wagner

Executive Director

Advocates for Children and Youth

Neil Bergsman

Director

Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute

Kevin Lindamood

President and CEO

Health Care for the Homeless, Inc.

Barbara Dwyer Gunn

President and CEO

Seedco

Rosetta Robinson

Interfaith Works

Emergency Assistance Coalition

Calvin Valentine
Executive Director
MarylandCAN

Brian D. Banks
Board Member
World Wide Community

Bishop Doug Miles
Co-Chair
Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD)

Earl S. El-Amin
Imam
The Muslim Community Cultural Center of Baltimore

Bishop Marcus A. Johnson, Sr.
Founder/Sr. Pastor
New Harvest Ministries

CC: Martin O'Malley, Governor of Maryland
T. Eloise Foster, Maryland Secretary of Budget & Management

¹ J. M. Murphy et al. (2001, October). *Maryland Meals for Achievement Year III Final Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED460784.pdf>.

² Food Research and Action Center. (2012, February). *Food Hardship in America 2011: Data for the Nation, States, 100 MSAs, and Every Congressional District*. Retrieved from http://frac.org/pdf/food_hardship_2011_report.pdf

³ United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. (2012, July 25). *Food Consumer Price Index and Food Price Outlook and Expenditures*. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook.aspx>

⁴ Share Our Strength. (2012). *Hunger in Our Schools: Share Our Strength's Teacher Report*. Retrieved from http://www.strength.org/school_breakfast/pdfs/report_full.pdf

⁵ Based on calculated data from the Maryland State Department of Education

⁶ Based on calculated data from the Maryland State Department of Education

⁷ Based on calculated data from the Maryland State Department of Education

⁸ Based on MMFA data from the Maryland State Department of Education

⁹ Maryland State Department of Education. (2012). *Testimony – Response to the Analyst's Review and Recommendations*. Given by Sadusky, B. Retrieved from <http://dbm.maryland.gov/agencies/operbudget/FY2013Testimony/R00A02.pdf>