

November 16, 2012

The Honorable Martin O'Malley  
Governor of Maryland  
State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401

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

Dear Governor O'Malley,

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

As you know, MMFA is a national model for increasing access to the federal School Breakfast Program, with proven links to improved academic performance, health and behavior.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Increasing participation in school breakfast is also 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.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the USDA estimates that food costs will rise between 3.0-4.0% in 2013.<sup>4</sup> While efforts are being made to improve our nation's economy, many Maryland families are still struggling to make ends meet. With limited budgets, many families rely on school meals. According to the MSDE Free and Reduced-Price Meal data for the 2011-2012 school year, 42 percent of the enrolled students were approved for free and reduced-price meals. 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.

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."<sup>5</sup> 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 extremely important to academic achievement, and 71% reporting they had a positive experience with an in-classroom breakfast program.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 million<sup>8</sup> **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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

We recognize that you must make many difficult decisions as you prepare your FY 2014 budget, and we commend you for your leadership on hunger issues and support for MMFA last year. Increasing the state's investment in MMFA is critical to reaching your goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015. 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 in the fight to end childhood hunger.

Very truly yours,

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CC: T. Eloise Foster, Maryland Secretary of Budget & Management  
Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Hunger Solutions. (2012, March). *Serving Maryland's Children: Measuring Access to the School Breakfast Program*. Retrieved from: [www.marylandhungersolutions.org](http://www.marylandhungersolutions.org)

<sup>3</sup> 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](http://frac.org/pdf/food_hardship_2011_report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> 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>

<sup>5</sup> 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>

<sup>6</sup> Share Our Strength. (2012). *Hunger in Our Schools: Share Our Strength's Teacher Report*. Retrieved from <http://join.strength.org/site/DocServer/2012-teacher-report-full-final.pdf?docID=8902>

<sup>7</sup> Based on calculated data from the Maryland State Department of Education

<sup>8</sup> Based on calculated data from the Maryland State Department of Education

<sup>9</sup> Based on calculated data from the Maryland State Department of Education

<sup>10</sup> Based on MMFA data from the Maryland State Department of Education