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**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the  
Maryland House of Delegates  
Ways and Means Committee  
For the Hearing on  
State Department of Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Funding  
(Maryland Cares for Kids Act)  
HB 315  
February 8, 2018  
SUPPORT**

Maryland PTA represents thousands of volunteer members and families in 900 public schools. For nearly 103 years, our mission has been to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. Maryland PTA is comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. As the state's oldest and largest child advocacy organization, Maryland PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education.

**Maryland PTA submits this testimony in support of House Bill 315, State Department of Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Funding (Maryland Cares for Kids Act).**

This bill expands access to school meals (breakfast and lunch) by eliminating the Reduced-Price Meals category so that students who currently qualify for reduced-price meals would be eligible for free school meals. Maryland PTA supports this bill because eliminating the student-share of the cost of meals fully maximizes the opportunity for all students who are eligible to receive a needed meal for *free instead of at a reduced-price*.

School meals matter. School breakfast and lunch programs improve health, support learning, and reduce food insecurity (the limited or uncertain access to enough food). Children who lack proper nutrition have trouble focusing in school. For many children, the breakfast and lunch they get at school is the only healthy food they eat all day. Many low-income students cannot participate in the school meal programs because their household income is too high to qualify for free meals, yet too low for them to afford the reduced-price school meal co-pays. As a result, reduced-price eligible students are more likely to incur cafeteria debts and often go without the food they need.

While many interventions target high-poverty schools, this bill directly targets the children who are in need, regardless of which school they attend and would help over 45,000 students in Maryland (according to Maryland State Department of Education enrollment data for the 2016-2017 school year, which is available at <http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/School-Community-Nutrition/FreeReducedPriceMealStatistics.aspx>). Maryland PTA is involved in monitoring and evaluating school meal programs to ensure high quality nutrition for children and youth in accordance with the guidelines recommended by the US Department of Agriculture. We believe this bill fulfills a gap in the food needs of Maryland Public School students.

It is for these reasons above that Maryland PTA encourages your vote to SUPPORT House Bill 315.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

*Latisha Corey*

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