

Good morning honorable chair,

I am here today to speak in favor of HB 686 as head of legislation for SERV (Students for Equity and Reform), a non-partisan student group that advocates for legislation to support young people throughout the commonwealth. Recent data from the non-profit, *Feeding America*, shows that there are 165,000 hungry children in our commonwealth and as of 2021 43.5% of that group are apart of families who live above the federal poverty line and, as such, do not qualify for many federal programs. Not only do we have a moral responsibility to feed hungry kids via HB 686, but also an economic and fiscal responsibility to do so.

According to multiple studies which tracked student performance following enrollment in CEP (Community Eligibility Program) students experienced:

- Improved math test scores¹
- Improved attendance rates²
- Improved classroom behavior³
- Decreased suspension rates⁴

If these indicators of heightened educational benefits is not enough, Universal Free School lunch is also more cost efficient with schools enrolled in the CEP spending an average of sixty-seven cents less each lunch, and fifty-eight cents less for each breakfast. If that isn't enough there is good reason to believe that this bill will pay for itself.

Hungry Kids⁵

- Are 31% more likely to be hospitalized for health issues, in the short term costing in excess of \$12,000
- Are 90% more likely to have their health reported as "fair/poor" compared to children from food secure households whose health was more likely to be reported as "excellent/good"
- And Just one diagnosis of protein or calorie malnutrition costs Medicaid approximately 1.25 million dollars in children aged 0-4

It costs about 20 dollars a week to feed a child lunch. The state of Virginia will end up covering the cost of child hunger either now, through the supply of Free school lunch, or later through payment for Medicaid, but it is less costly and more humane to pay that price now.

Please, feed hungry children. Support HB 686. Thank you chair.

¹ [Free Lunch for All! The Effect of the Community Eligibility Provision on Academic Outcomes - ScienceDirect](#)

² [Universal Access to Free School Meals through the Community Eligibility Provision Is Associated with Better Attendance for Low-Income Elementary School Students in Wisconsin - ScienceDirect](#)

³ [School breakfast and student behavior \(wiley.com\)](#)

⁴ [w24986.pdf \(nber.org\)](#)

⁵ [child-economy-study.pdf \(nokidhungry.org\)](#)