

Chesapeake Union Exempted Village School District

Doug Hale, Superintendent

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Finance Committee (HB 33)

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Chair Edwards Richardson, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeny and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide public testimony regarding House Bill 33.

I am Doug Hale, Superintendent of Chesapeake Exempted Village School District which educates 1300 students in the Southern Appalachian area of Lawrence County. I have genuinely enjoyed each day of my 42 years of service to public education. Public Education was great to me as a student/athlete. I had many teachers, counselors, principals, and coaches who guided and influenced me in a positive way. I wanted to give back the positive experiences afforded me; therefore, I made a commitment of service to public education. I have never looked back!

I want to thank you for the assistance in authorizing nutrition program regulations waivers to allowing schools and districts to provide free school lunches to all the students regardless of family income and to claim the meals at the federal meal rate. As the program ended in June 2022, Ohio's Appalachian started to brace themselves for the challenge to come, as students and families would have to meet strict income qualifications to receive a free lunch.

I am here to testify that hungry kids cannot perform academically. In Chesapeake and other Appalachian districts, where students face a high concentration of poverty, geographic isolation, exposure to addiction, lack of social service resources; our students typically center their sense of community and collect their necessary resources to navigate tough home lives at our schools. In our district and region, it is common not to have an alternate, safe, community hub outside of the school day. Providing free and nutritional meals during this time is crucial, not only to the students' basic survival but also to set the stage for academic success and a higher quality of life.

We turn no student away for a meal. Once our lunch terminals were turned back on as school began this school year, lunch debt began to mount. There is a stigma given to the students who go through the lunch line and qualified for a free or reduced lunch. This is not so evident in our elementary school, but the stigma rises in the middle school and becomes very serious at the high school level as you would guess. As the students of our district are trying to uplift most, this is an unnecessary hurdle in their nutritional, mental and behavioral health.

Before the pandemic, our Board of Education would balance our food service program at a rate of \$100,000-\$140,000 per year from our general fund. With the waivers used during pandemic the Board of Education did not have to do this. Our district could this general fund monies for the hiring of additional social workers, counselors, custodians, resource officers and teachers. These funds could be used to provide additional programs to serve our students.

Currently for the 2022-23 school year we had 14 families within \$100 of qualifying for free or reduced meals. There were 32 families were within \$1,000 of qualifying for free or reduced meals. By comparison, in October 2022 when all student received a free breakfast and lunch the Chesapeake District served 27,806 meals; in October 2023 when we returned to paying for meals our district served 19,266 meals; a difference of 8,540 meals served. Our students deserve the

opportunity of having a free, nutritional meal each day. Our students deserve the general funds used to balance the food service programs for other programs and activities our district could offer them.

I wholehearted support the need for 100% free breakfast and lunch to all Ohio students. I urge you to include in your budget the funds needed to supplement the federal reimbursement we receive.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Chesapeake is looking for a positive outcome of HB 33.

Doug Hale

Chesapeake Exempted Village Superintendent

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