

Food Insecurity and Juvenile System Prevention

Project Origin

Grounding prevention in foundational physiological needs.

Food security is the base upon which safety and stability are built.

Ecological Model

Examining needs across the Individual, Family, Community, and Policy levels to understand cumulative impacts.

Upstream Prevention

Reframing basic needs fulfillment as a primary justice reform strategy that interrupts pathways to system contact.

THE URGENCY OF FOOD ACCESS IN MARYLAND

1 in 3
Residents

~2 million Marylanders face hunger this year—the highest since 2022.

1 in 6
Children

Over 219,000 Maryland kids are currently food insecure.

2x Gap

Black communities experience hunger at double the rate of white communities.

The
"Working Poor"

40% of food-insecure families earn too much to qualify for state aid.

Source: MD Hunger Solutions

https://gocpp.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/MDHS-and-Food-Insecurity-Prevention-Workgroup_7.14.25.pdf

Food Insecurity has Profound and Severe Impacts on Teenagers

Impact on Physical Health

90% more likely to be in "fair" to "poor" health (ages 0 to 3)

3x more frequent stomach aches (ages 4 to 5)



experts emphasize that childhood food setbacks often lead to chronic health issues and pain in older youth and adults

Impact on Mental Health & Well-being

5x more likely to have attempted suicide

74% more likely to exhibit disruptive behaviors and social difficulties



more likely to experience clinical depression and anxiety

Impact on Educational Development

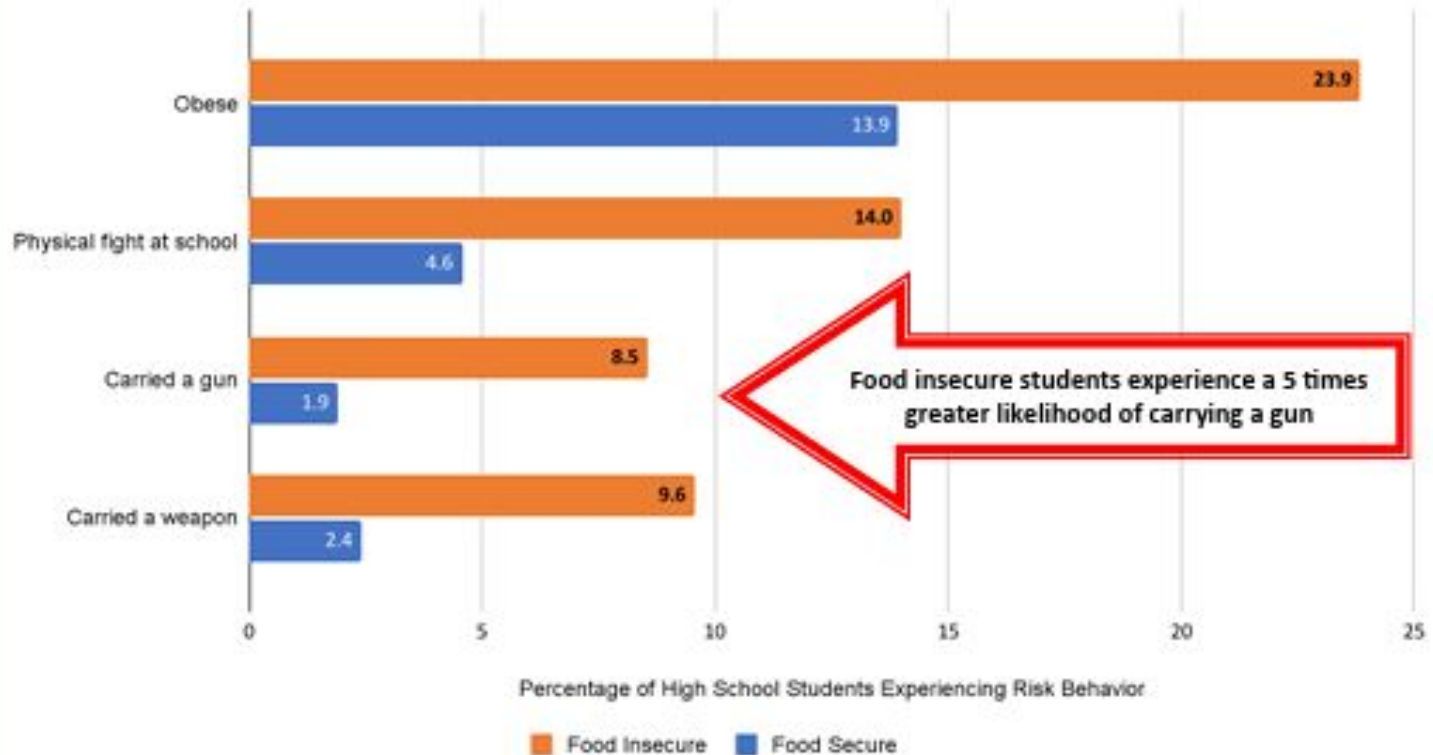


negative impacts on a student's cognitive and academic development



irregular school attendance and participation in learning due to higher rates of hospitalization and chronic illness

High School Student Physical Risk Behaviors, by Food Security Status



Source: Student Support Network
<https://studentsupportnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/New-Data-Reveals-Disturbingly-High-Rate-of-Food-Insecurity-for-Many-Maryland-Students-0224.pdf>

THE URGENCY OF THE PROJECT AND PARTNERSHIP



JOHNS HOPKINS
CENTER *for* A LIVABLE FUTURE

The Mission

To examine how food insecurity impacts mental health, school performance, coping behaviors, and juvenile system risk to generate actionable evidence for tangible statewide reforms.

Primary Question

How does food insecurity tie to juvenile system involvement, and how can administrative policy decisions be shifted to address these foundational gaps?

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Emphasize Fulfillment of Essential Needs

Illuminate how unmet needs can lead to the criminalization of survival behaviors

Advance Timely Research

Investigate how food insecurity intersects with youth wellbeing and juvenile system involvement

Generate Qualitative Data

Center the voices of young people alongside analysis of school, arrest, and policy data

Provide Evidence-based, Policy-relevant Insights

Guide prevention strategies in Maryland by being integrated into the Commission's Annual Report

REMAINING PROJECT TIMELINE

Refine interview questions,
identify potential partner
organizations, IRB submission

Recruitment of ~8-10
participants per focus group

Data collection: Interviews &
arrest/school record analysis

Data analysis &
draft findings

Integration into Workgroup
Recommendations for next
Annual Report & final delivery

QUANTITATIVE DATA REQUEST

Zip code level counts based on youth residential address

Specific focus on "Theft Misdemeanor" charges as a proxy for survival behavior

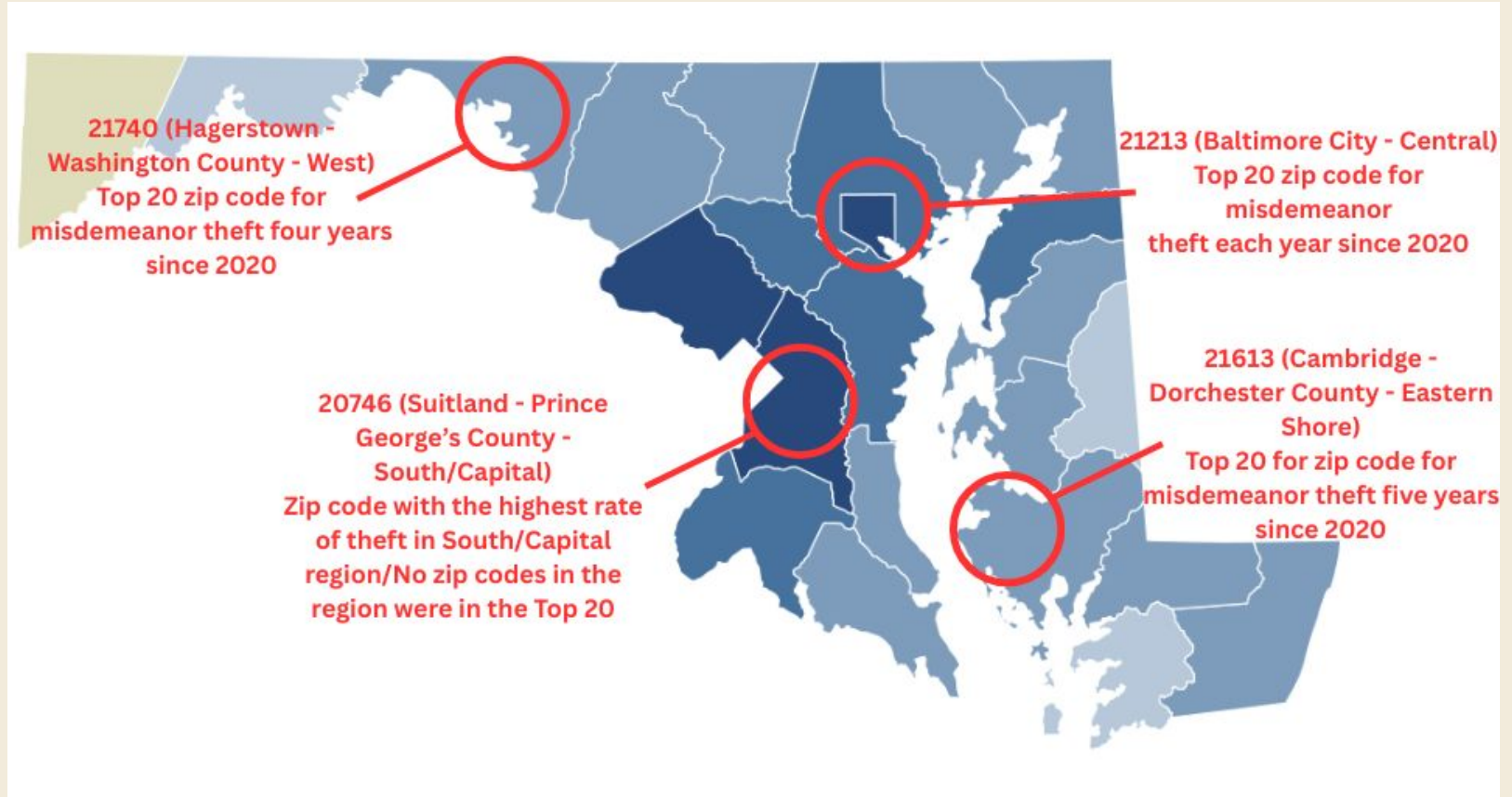
Identified where the highest volume of youth are entering the system for survival-based offenses

Overlaid with data from the Maryland Food Bank and Maryland Hunger Solutions

The "finalists" were ZIP codes where high delinquency rates directly intersected with high "food gap" scores

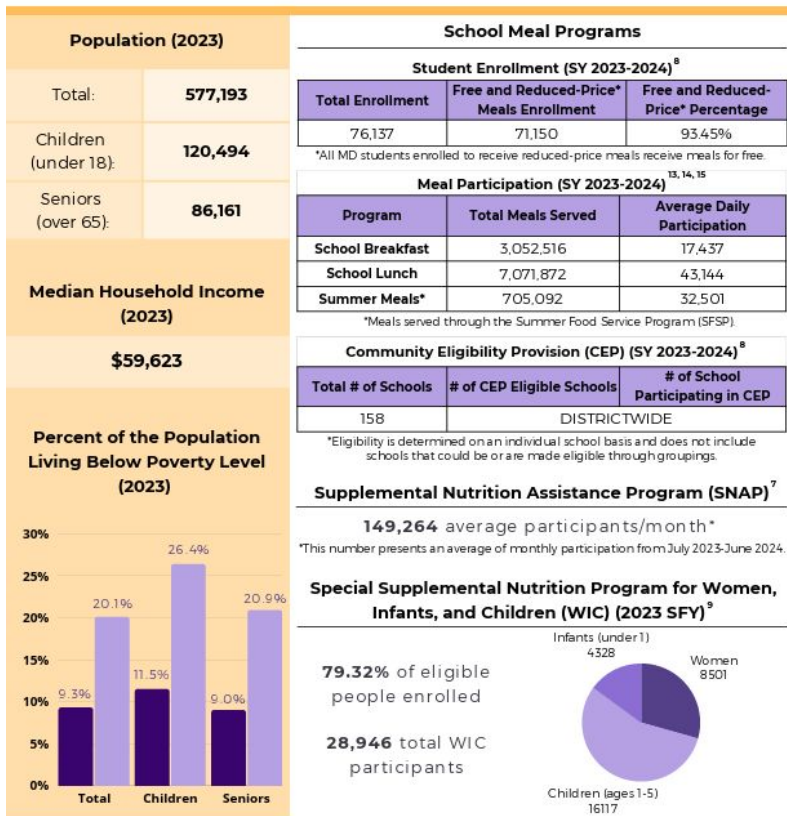
To ensure the study informs statewide policy, the team intentionally culled the list to include diverse demographics

SELECT ZIP CODES FOR PROJECT FOCUS

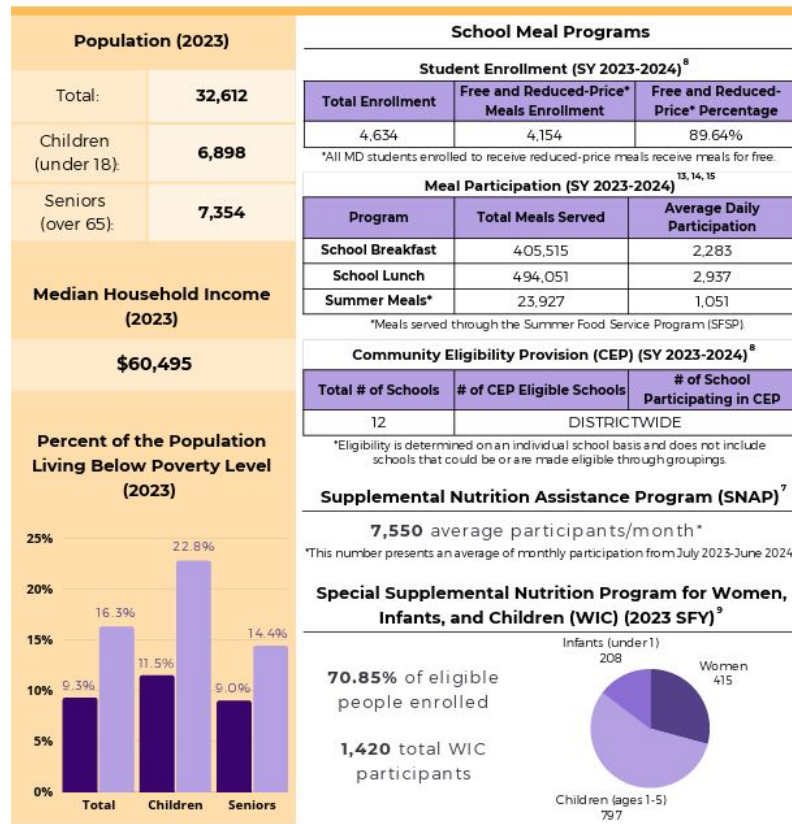




BALTIMORE CITY

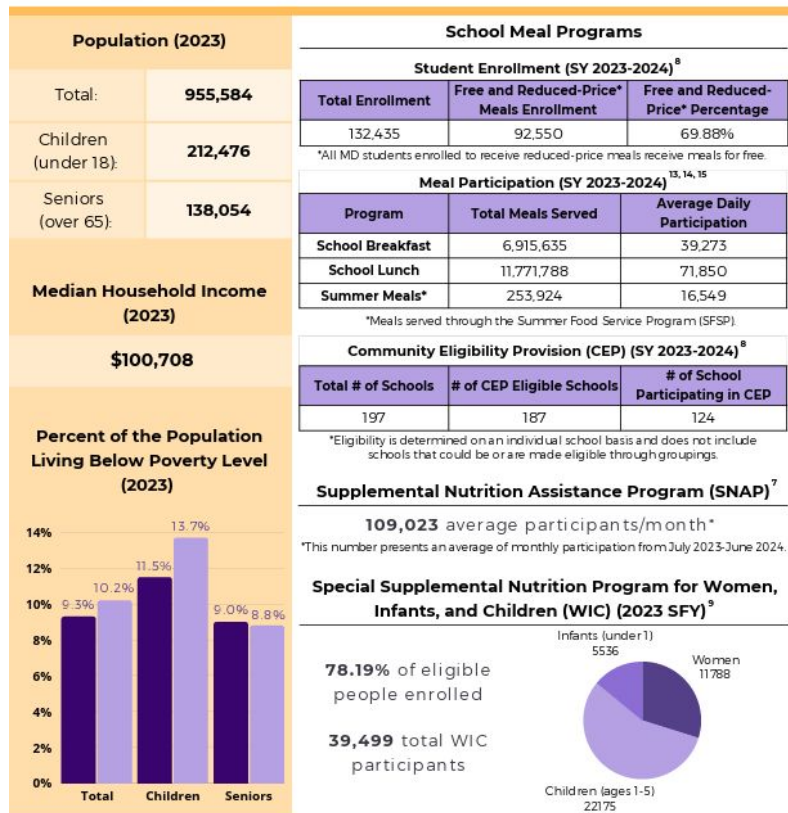


DORCHESTER COUNTY

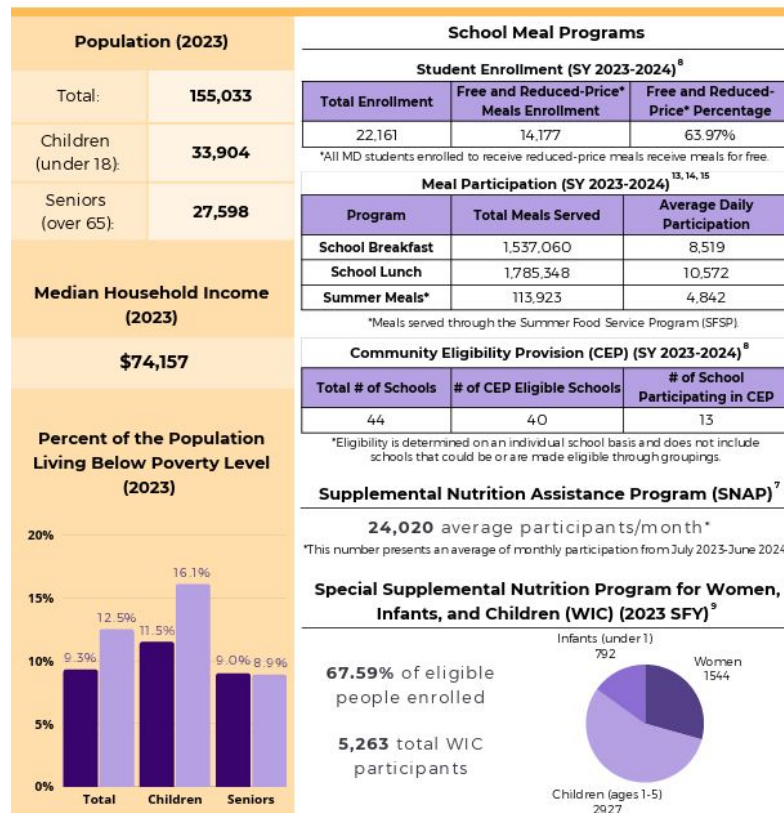




PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY



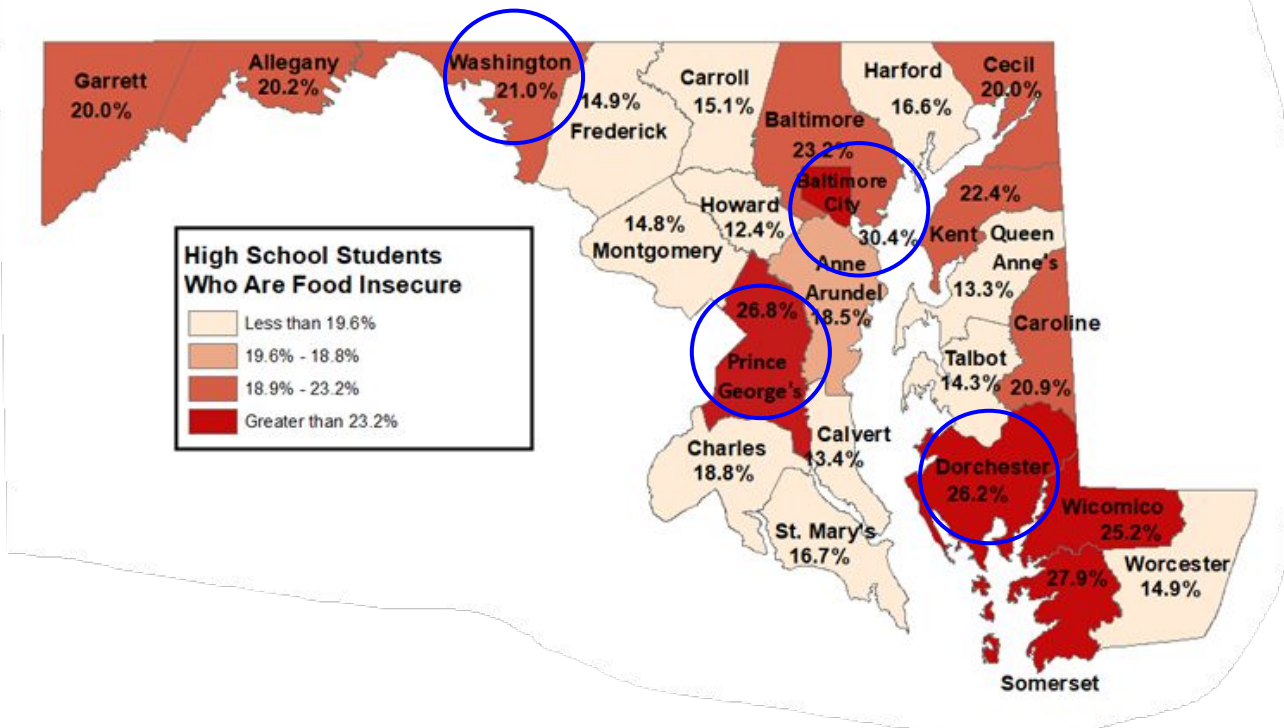
WASHINGTON COUNTY



Geographic Disparities in Food Insecurity Rates, High School Students

State-wide, 19.6% of high school students are food insecure.

Food insecurity rates for high school students are highest in Somerset (27.9%), Prince George's (26.8%), Dorchester (26.2%), and Wicomico (25.2%) counties.



QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Focus Groups: Direct engagement with young people in zip codes where high food insecurity and DJS involvement overlap.

Lived Experience: Centering voices of youth to identify barriers (transportation, economic, bureaucratic).

Solutions Design: Incorporating recommendations into practical, prevention-oriented policy proposals.

Pathways: Documenting how hunger influences absenteeism, stress, and survival behaviors.

SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS

In the past month, did you have to skip a meal because your family didn't have enough money for food?

In the past month, did you worry that food at home would run out before your family got money to buy more?

In the past month, has the size of your meals been cut because your family didn't have enough money for food?

On a regular school day, what is the source of your lunch foods?

In the past month, how often were you not able to eat a balanced meal because your family didn't have enough money?

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

How big of a problem is it for young people around here to worry about having enough food?

What happens when there is not enough food in the household?

Can you describe some of the things that young people might do to get food if they were really hungry?

Where do most young people go to buy food in your neighborhood?

What are some strategies young people use to get food if they don't have any money?

**Maryland
Commission on
Juvenile Justice
Reform and
Emerging and Best
Practices**

THANKS

the Superintendents from Dorchester,
Prince George's, and Washington County
School Districts for their outreach
assistance to potential partnership
organizations.

Next steps:

The Prevention Workgroup and Center for
Livable Future will be reaching out to
community organizations to help with
recruitment.

You will be hearing from us soon!

QUESTIONS?