Testimony – 21-0053R

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Good evening, I am happy to be here tonight and thankful for the opportunity to listen to students and others. I am especially grateful to the council members for their attention and to Councilwoman Ramos for her leadership and for partnering with our students about this issue that is so important to them.

My name is Molly Carr Swatek, Mrs. Carr to my students. I have been a social studies teacher in Baltimore City public schools for 13 years and currently teach Government at ACCE. I will not take time to share my personal thoughts about student preferences or menu options. I will leave that to the students, wh have definitely shown their passion for this issue today. Instead, I would like to highlight what I think would be an incredible opportunity for student leadership and meaningful partnerships to address this issue that could benefit our students, school communities, and entire district.

As we work to create policy regarding what students eat daily in our cafeterias, I see an opportunity for students to not only have their voices heard, but for BCPSS to embrace students who could provide the necessary input and leadership in this area**.** By collaborating together with students and others, hopefully the many innovative institutions and businesses throughout Baltimore, lunches will improve, students will be more satisfied and ready to learn, and schools will better serve their students.

Additionally, city schools will be developing young people who actively participate in making their own personal choices. Also this could be a chance to build student leaders who can partner with adults to represent their peers and foster communities which are both responsive and inclusive of many perspectives and needs. *Students should have a seat at the lunch table, but also at the decision-making table.* These are authentic experiences of personal choice and leadership that will not only benefit school communities, but also the students who are involved in the process. The skills learned by taking an active role will help our young people continue to make good decisions for their health and beyond.

I am keenly aware of how multi-faceted and perhaps daunting creating healthy and student-approved meals may be - the many details, regulations, and changing desires of students are not simple. But I feel that this is an ideal opportunity to truly teach and partner with students to show them that their voices matter, that difficult tasks are worth tackling, and that change is possible.

I believe in both the students and the adults of Baltimore City schools, in their ability to work together and to create new and different solutions to old problems that will truly change how students and families view and interact with our schools.

Thank you again to Councilwoman Ramos, to BCPSS schools, to the council. I look forward to following our students’ lead in the work ahead.