



Maryland Community College Chief Student Affairs Officers

An affinity group of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges

Appropriations Committee

HB 1175-Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program - Established Favorable Testimony

Testimony on behalf of the Maryland Community College Chief Student Affairs Officers

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Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 1175, a bill to support students who struggle with food insecurity at Maryland's public colleges. Thanks to the sponsors of this bill for your concern about food insecure students, and for all the support you provide to Maryland's community colleges.

Food insecurity has a direct impact on student success. Poverty and hunger often prevent low-income students from completing their education, and inconsistent access to affordable, nutritious food is a barrier to student success. I have seen first-hand students struggle with non-academic barriers to their academic success, particularly food insecurity. The faculty and staff at our colleges bear witness to these challenges each and every day as students struggle to be successful in the classroom while overcoming extraordinary difficulties, such as hunger.

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, founder of the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice, recently presented findings from the Hope Center survey on the challenges that many college students face when accessing basic needs, noting that, "Regardless of which community college we survey, we find that about 1 in 2 students deals with food insecurity." Moreover, the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice 2019 #RealCollege survey found that despite the efforts made by colleges and universities 30 days prior to the survey, 39 percent of student respondents were food insecure. This is in addition to the fact that 46 percent of student respondents were housing-insecure, and 17 percent were homeless at some point during the previous year.

This issue is a phenomenon at institutions of higher learning in general; however, community college students struggle at a higher rate than their counterparts at four-year institutions. A report released by the Healthy Minds Study, the Association of Community College Trustees, and Single Stop, found that 50 percent of all community college students in the nation struggle with food and/or housing insecurity. Another recent study revealed that 56 percent of students surveyed at two Maryland community colleges experience food insecurity, and students who lived alone, with roommates or others were more likely to experience food insecurity than students who lived with parents or relatives.

If students are stressed and worried about where their next meal will come from, they are unlikely to focus on academic study. At the community colleges, many of the students we serve come to us directly from high school where they have had access to the K-12 free and reduced meal program. Some are first-generation students and do not realize that the same level of food support they received throughout their secondary education will not be provided in college. Our students need our help and your support to give them access to healthy food options on a consistent basis.

At Montgomery College, where I serve as Director of Student Affairs and Initiatives, it is our mission to ensure that no student goes hungry. Our Fuel for Success Food Campaign employs mobile food markets and campus food pantries to help students prevent food insecurity. Food is distributed at no cost to the student. The Fuel for Success Food Campaign also makes students aware of community resources for food throughout Montgomery County.

HB 1175 will help Montgomery College and all of Maryland's 16 community colleges fight the problem of food insecurity by designating campuses that meet certain criteria as hunger-free campuses and allowing these institutions an allocation of grant funding to help with their efforts. There are already substantial initiatives across Maryland's community colleges, like those at Montgomery College, to deal with food insecurity including food pantries, community gardens and awareness campaigns about community resources that are available to students. HB 1175 helps colleges to coordinate their efforts and report on their results, while providing needed funding to continue home-grown initiatives to fight food insecurity at each of our colleges.

I urge a favorable report on HB 1175. On behalf of the Maryland Community College Chief Students Affairs Officers, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this critical legislation. We appreciate your support for our students.