

Committee: Appropriations

TO: Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Committee

FROM: Devin M. Neil, Salisbury University Student Government Association President

DATE: March 5, 2020

Testimony In Support

House Bill 1175 Higher Education - Hunger Free Campus Grant Program - Established

House Appropriations' Committee

March 5, 2020

Dear Chairperson McIntosh and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Devin Neil, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 1175 Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program - Established. I also wish to thank Delegate Debra Davis for sponsoring this legislation. I appear today to indicate the support of the Salisbury University Student Government Association for HB 1175, on behalf of our undergraduate population. The affordability of higher education and food insecurity on college campuses are daily issues of real concern to the Salisbury University student community, and this legislation is an important mechanism in addressing this challenge.

I will briefly explain how the current donated food pantry system on our campus works, and how the proposed grant proposed by House Bill 1175 would help. SU currently has a campus food pantry and a way to donate meal swipes at our dining hall. This was established through the university's President Citizen Scholar's program and operated through the SU Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE). A student group was formed called "Food for the Flock" which is responsible for staffing the food pantry. The following semesters' student visits consisting of food drop-offs and food pick-ups are as follow: Fall 2018, 71 visits; Spring 2019, 179 visits; Fall 2019, 230 visits; and, Spring 2020 thus far, 89 visits. This data this does not include donations from the donation box in the Academic Commons, or SGA's "Fill the Square" event, a canned food drive. Records indicate only a total of 5 meal swipes were donated and distributed.

As a campus community we already have the administrative mechanisms in place, but from these statistics this resource is underutilized on our campus. Part of this problem is that the food pantry is run primarily through student volunteers, which limit its hours of operation. This grant could help to increase staff and hours for the pantry, therefore increasing student access. A grant would also increase the accountability of the campus community to keep

the food pantry operating in a sustainable manner, through a point contact and a hunger task force.

Grant funding could also aid in the marketing of this SU campus resource. While having a revamped advertising of the food pantry, a grant could help to increase market reach awareness to more students. This would assist students who are experiencing food insecurity know of the existence of the food pantry, especially students living off campus, or new to the campus community. Additionally, we are looking into the possibility of creating an online system to donate and distribute meal swipes, since we currently use tickets similar to community events that are often hosted at the dining hall. Not only would an online system make it easier for students to use this meal swipe program, but it would permit anonymity of food insecure students so as not to feel insecure when using the resource. This would increase the likelihood and frequency of students in need, using this resource.

Overall, the grant established by HB 1175 would not only support campuses that currently do not have a food pantry, but even those with existing mechanisms such as Salisbury University. While the SU campus is advanced from the lens of the prospective grant program with our food pantry and having an existing meal swipe donation program, we could reach more students with the support of a grant program as provided by the legislation.

On behalf of Salisbury University undergraduate students and the Student Government Association, I respectfully urge the House Appropriations Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1175.