



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM: ADVOCACY
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND MANNA FOOD CENTER OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
ON MARCH 5, 2020
BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF HB 1175 Higher Education – Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program --
Established**

Honorable Chair Maggie McIntosh, Vice-Chair Michael A. Jackson, and members of the House Appropriations Committee

The Critical Issues Forum: Advocacy for Social Justice (CIF), which was formed by a group of synagogues in Montgomery County, appreciates the opportunity to provide its testimony in support of HB 1175, a bill to establish a Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program. Comprised of Temple Beth Ami, Kol Shalom, and Adat Shalom, CIF represents over 1,750 households and three denominations of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist. CIF serves as a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on policy issues that relate to our shared values. For the past several years, CIF has advocated for effective solutions to food insecurity and hunger in Maryland. CIF, for example, was actively involved in developing and advocating for the Summer SNAP for Children Act that was passed last session.

Manna Food Center is Montgomery County, Maryland's ("Manna") designated food bank, with a singular mission of eliminating hunger in our county. Through food distribution, education and advocacy, we are making strides on behalf of more than 63,000 county residents who experience food insecurity. There are approximately 34,000 participants each year who receive supplemental food from Manna Food Center which is equal to 3.1 million pounds of food distributed.

It is no secret that hunger challenges students' ability to learn. Food insecurity issues in public education from elementary to high school are well known. Maryland has established several programs to address that matter. **Less well known is that food insecurity is a significant issue on college campuses that impacts the success of college programs adversely.**

In a recent nationwide survey sent to 1.5 million students at 123 colleges and universities, it was estimated, based on nearly 86,000 responses, that 48 percent of community college students and 41 percent of four-year university students are food insecure.¹ Other studies estimate college food insecurity from a low of 9 percent to more than 50 percent.² Within the State of Maryland, a study at the University of Maryland found food insecurity a pervasive **concern** demonstrating adverse effects on academic performance and self-reported physical and mental health.³ Findings included:

- About 20% of UMD students surveyed were food insecure at some point in the 12 months preceding the survey, with 13% experiencing low levels of food security and 7% experiencing very low levels of food security. An additional 21% of the respondents reported marginal food security levels.
- Food insecurity has pervasive impacts on student wellbeing, academic performance, and professional/career development. Food insecure students reported poorer general health and experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, distress, anger, and loneliness than their peers. On average, compared to their counterparts, food-insecure students had lower GPAs and were more likely to withdraw from the university before completing their degrees.
- Some food insecure students also reported concerns over self-image, causing them to feel like a “failure at adulthood.” Additionally, food-insecure students reported missing out on professional and social development opportunities (e.g., unpaid internships) that may benefit their future career pursuits.
- Food insecurity disproportionately affects certain college students. First-generation college students, racial/ethnic minority students, international students, those with an immigrant background, transfer students, those who identified as transgender/gender non-conforming, students with a disability, students who were divorced/separated/widowed, and those from lower socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, as well as students who worked longer hours and were financially independent, were at greater risk of being food insecure than their peers.
- Budget shortages, lack of access to a vehicle or reliable transit to the grocery store, knowledge and perceptions about using food assistance services, and dietary needs served as additional barriers to food access.

¹ College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A National Real College Report, April 2019:
https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HOPE_realcollege_National_report_digital.pdf

² <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/04/30/new-research-finds-discrepancies-estimates-food-insecurity-among-college-students>

³ https://studentaffairs.umd.edu/sites/studentaffairs.umd.edu/files/food_access_student_well-being_study_report_september2019.pdf

- Food security levels are variable and can change rapidly for students who lack reliable financial resources.

This is a real issue for Maryland colleges. We have had firsthand experience in Montgomery County as there are Montgomery College students who come to Manna to combat their food insecurity issues.

There are Federal programs that some college students can take advantage of to address food security issues. The Government Accountability Office recently issued a report noting failures of many colleges and states to inform students of programs like SNAP that they may be eligible to utilize.⁴ GAO found that some states reported that they are taking steps to help students access SNAP by conducting outreach to colleges and developing guidance. Yet GAO reported that 9 of the 14 college officials said that they were unfamiliar with or did not fully understand SNAP's student eligibility rules. GAO concluded that clarification of SNAP student eligibility rules and enhanced information sharing could help ensure that potentially eligible college students can access federal food assistance programs.

HB 1175, by establishing for Maryland a Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program, will help address this pervasive food insecurity issue at our State public two and four-year college institutions. This program will:

- (1) address student hunger;
- (2) leverage more sustainable solutions to address basic food needs on public campuses;
- (3) raise awareness of services currently offered on public campuses that address basic food needs; and
- (4) build strategic partnerships at the local, state, and national levels to address food insecurity among students.

HB 1175 provides grant funds of \$310,000 to be distributed to eligible colleges by the Maryland Higher Education Commission, the agency responsible for administering this program. **This amount of grant is a small down-payment to help ensure that our students can effectively utilize Maryland's public college and university programs.**

To be eligible for a grant, the school must take specified actionable steps to address hunger on their own campuses including affirmatively, but not limited to, informing students (including students in federal work-study programs) about SNAP availability (Maryland Food Supplement Program), having at least one food pantry on campus, and conducting a standardized annual student survey on hunger. HB 1175 has a reporting requirement by the Maryland Higher Education Commission to report the number and amounts of grants awarded, the impact of the

⁴ GAO report 19-95, FOOD INSECURITY: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits, Dec 2018.

program on campuses at a public institution of higher education, and the impact of awarded grants on reducing the number of students experiencing food insecurity.

The CIF and Manna strongly urge this Committee to support HB 1175 to establish a Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program to improve the ability for college students at both two-year and four-year public schools to graduate and become productive citizens of Maryland.