

March 5, 2020

Maryland House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building Room 121
Annapolis, MD 21401

Regarding: Support for Maryland House Bill 1175, An Act to establish the Higher Education – Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program

Attention: Chair Maggie McIntosh and Vice-Chair Michael Jackson,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our support for Maryland House Bill 1175, An Act to establish the Higher Education – Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program. This bill comes at a critical time in which the vast majority of new jobs created require some form of postsecondary credential. Yet, outdated perspectives about who today’s students are, and the respective policies reflecting these views, limit the ability of far too many students to pursue and achieve success in higher education. This, in turn, exacerbates income and racial inequality and creates the poverty trap.

College is much harder for disenfranchised groups—such as people of color and low-income, parenting, working, first-generation, or immigrant students—who have significant financial challenges even after financial aid. Recent research shows that up to 95 percent of schools are unaffordable for students with low incomes¹. The fact that college is unaffordable can reduce students’ performance and motivation in high school, diminishes the odds that they will get to and through college, and increases the chances that they will end up with debt they cannot repay.

Despite these costs and challenges, many people continue to enroll in college. They understand that education beyond high school is one of the most reliable pathways to economic security. Efforts to improve access to nutrition support programs, as suggested in this bill, are critical to reduce hardship and support the educational attainment of students that can lead to family-sustaining wages, improved intergenerational mobility and a reduction in the racial wealth gap.

¹ Emily Deruy, “Measuring College (Un)affordability”, The Atlantic, March 23, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/03/measuring-college-unaffordability/520476/>

Food (and housing) are critical components of the cost of attending college—in fact, at public colleges and universities these costs, together with the cost of books, transportation, and medical expenses, can constitute more than half of the total cost. That’s why the Hope Center fields student surveys using validated approaches to assess the security of their food and housing. Our most recent national report from 2019, representing 167,000 students from 171 two-year institutions and 56 four-year institutions indicates that:

- 39% of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days
- 46% of respondents were housing insecure in the previous year
- 17% of respondents were homeless in the previous year

The Hope Center’s work, as well as that of others, has consistently found that some students are at higher risk of basic needs insecurity than others including stark racial and ethnic disparities. For example, in 2019, White students had lower rates of food insecurity (36%) as compared to Hispanic or Latinx of (47%), Black of (54%), and Indigenous students (60%), respectively. As with other basic needs insecurities, White students also experience homelessness at lower rates than most of their peers.

These national numbers align with those uncovered in similar studies in California and New York and are supported by a series of peer-reviewed journal articles. We know these problems exist across Maryland too. We now have five years of national #RealCollege survey data that reveals the scope of basic needs insecurity among students. They cannot, however, be interpreted as trends since different institutions participated in different years. Our survey data found that from 2015–2019²:

Food Insecurity:

- At two-year institutions, rates of food insecurity among students ranged from 42% to 56%
- At four-year institutions, rates of food insecurity among students ranged from 33% to 42%
- The weighted average across two and four-year institutions is 43%

² Christine Baker-Smith, Vanessa Coca, Sara Goldrick-Rab, Elizabeth Looker, Brianna Richardson, and Tiffani Williams., “#RealCollege 2020: Five Years of Evidence on Campus Basic Needs Insecurity,” The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. February 2020. https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2019_RealCollege_Survey_Report.pdf

Housing Insecurity:

- At two-year institutions, housing insecurity among students ranged from 46% to 60%
- At four-year institutions, housing insecurity among students ranged from 35% to 48%
- The weighted average across two and four-year institutions is 48%

Homelessness:

- At two-year institutions, rates of homelessness among students ranged from 12% to 18%
- At four-year institutions, rates of homelessness among students ranged from 9% to 16%
- The weighted average across two and four-year institutions is 16%

Without sufficient food to eat and a safe place to sleep, most people have trouble learning. Studies have shown that lack of access to food and proper nutrition exacerbates stress, anxiety, and depression,³ causes sleep disturbances and fatigue, and impairs cognitive functioning.⁴ While access to adequate nutrition relieves stress, improves vitality, and allows students to focus their energy on improving their educational and employment outcomes, thus, food and housing are critical educational expenses.

When students drop out of college because they cannot afford basic necessities, like food, billions of dollars in federal and state investments are undermined. There is growing recognition that reducing the basic needs insecurity of students complements state and federal workforce goals as well as bolstering higher education attainment goals. This is because we know conclusively that workers with a postsecondary education benefit from the majority of jobs with livable wages, employer-provided health, and retirement benefits. Similarly, overwhelming evidence links each level of postsecondary education achieved with improved social, economic, and health outcomes. These include higher earnings and marriage rates, lower unemployment and single-parent births,

³ Adrienne O’Neil, Shae E. Quirk, Siobhan Housden, et al., “Relationship Between Diet and Mental Health in Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review,” *American Journal of Public Health* vol. 104,10 (2014): e31-42, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4167107/>.

⁴ Michael W. Green, Peter J. Rogers, Nicola A. Elliman, and Susan J. Gatenby, “Impairment of Cognitive Performance Associated with Dieting and High Levels of Dietary Restraint,” *Physiology & Behavior* 55.3 (1994): 447-452, <http://www.seven-health.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Impairment-of-Cognitive-Performance-Associated-with-Dieting-and-High-Levels-of-Dietary-Restraint-.pdf>

and improved education outcomes for children. The good news is that, like Maryland, other states such as California, Washington, Minnesota, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and even the federal government have started to recognize and address the challenges students face meeting their basic needs.

The proposed Hunger-Free Campus Grant legislation recognizes that in order to learn, Maryland students must have access to affordable food. The program will bring critical resources to higher education institutions to reduce the food insecurity students face and the risks hunger poses to learning. This program will also provide essential data that neither the federal government nor the state of Maryland collects on how many college students are dealing with food insecurity. This data will contribute to a body of growing evidence that shows how critical food access is to educational success and better equip policymakers and institutional leaders with real evidence to inform their decisions.

It is for these reasons that we fully support the proposed legislation and ask for a favorable report from this committee.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab

Founding Director of the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice
and Professor of Higher Education Policy & Sociology at Temple University