



Testimony in Support of HB 1175

Higher Education – Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program

Appropriations

March 5, 2020

Maryland Hunger Solutions urges your support of HB1175, which requires the Maryland Higher Education Commission to create a Hunger-Free Campus Program at eligible two and four year public institutions in Maryland. The Hunger-Free Campus Program will raise awareness of student hunger and the services available both on and off campus for food-insecure students. The Program will also establish an on-campus food pantry or other means to receive food, as well as designating a staff member on campus to assist students with enrolling in Maryland's Food Supplement Program.

Hunger on college campuses is an issue not commonly addressed, as it often goes unseen. For some college students, especially first generation students, being food insecure is a reality they face every day at home and at school. Unlike other populations, such as children and seniors, there are not many resources available to college students struggling with hunger. There are no free-or-reduced meals for college students, and accessing SNAP benefits requires meeting additional eligibility guidelines. The Hunger-Free Campus Program looks to raise the awareness of these issues and provide short-and-long term solutions.

MD Hunger Solutions has worked with multiple colleges and universities to provide SNAP outreach to food-insecure students. We have assisted students from University of Baltimore, Prince George's Community College, and Montgomery County Community College. We have also provided SNAP outreach training at the Community College of Baltimore County and consulted with administrators at the University of Maryland. Many of these students are balancing classes and working jobs. However, those facing food insecurity have increased challenges of determining what and when they'll be eating next, as well as potential stigmatization of their circumstances.

The campus pantry at University of Baltimore is our base referral system to students seeking to apply for SNAP. Any student, faculty member or staff member is allowed to access the pantry for goods, and can ask to meet with us in person or over the phone to do an intake. While this is a good system for proactive students who are aware of the pantry, for those who do not access it due to fear of stigmatization or do not know about it, we are unable to assist with applying for SNAP. Having a dedicated staff member at each campus with the knowledge of how to navigate the SNAP application process and other resources will help put students at ease, as well as quicken their ability to access needed programs.

For college students, SNAP eligibility is based on meeting 20+ hours a week of work, work-study, and/or volunteering. This, on top of their academics, is a lot to ask, though many students are able to make ends meet while doing so. Many of the students we've assisted with applying for SNAP meet the work requirement, though were unaware of their eligibility for SNAP. The Hunger-Free Campus Program includes notifying students who participate in work-study of their eligibility for SNAP and could greatly



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Ending hunger and promoting well-being

increase participation among students in accessing a program that is proven to assist low-income households.

For students that are unable to access SNAP due to not meeting work requirements, having additional food resources on campus is essential. The creation of a food pantry that all students can access discretely not only reduces stigma, it can be a lifeline for students facing difficult situations. One such student approached us at Prince George's Community College, where a fire had unfortunately destroyed her apartment. She was thankfully able to find housing with a friend, but her SNAP dollars had run out and she needed food immediately. The campus pantry was able to meet those needs. While her situation is rare, having an on-campus pantry, as well as knowledgeable staff, creates more support systems for students when they need them.

We're also hopeful that the legislation will require the Department of Human Services to produce a simplified document detailing SNAP eligibility for college students in Maryland.

By enacting HB 1175, we can ensure that students will continue to get access to meals, even after they've left high school. Additionally, the Hunger-Free Campus Program will assist in de-stigmatizing food insecurity by allowing students to maintain their dignity during a time in their life where they should be focused on learning, not worrying about where their next meal is coming from.

Thank you for your consideration. Maryland Hunger Solutions **urges a favorable report on HB 1175.**