



HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.

201 North Charles Street, Suite 1104 Baltimore, MD 21201

SUPPORT – SB 767: Higher Education – Hunger Free Campus Grant Program – Established

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs March 9, 2020

Testimony of Kyra Brown, Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc.

The Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc. (HPRP) is a non-profit legal services provider that provides free legal representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness on legal issues that will lead to an end to homelessness. HPRP's Homeless Youth Initiative serves unaccompanied homeless youth ages 24 and younger.

The Homeless Persons Representation Project (HPRP) strongly supports SB 767. This bill will aid in creating a safety net for lower income college students who are experiencing food insecurity. In doing so this bill will also lead to equitable attainment of education for all students and create stability so that other basic needs, such as housing, will be more readily accessible.

Students experiencing food insecurity are more likely to experience difficulties focusing in their classes, and are more likely to experience housing insecurity. As food insecurity is highly correlated with housing insecurity and vice versa,¹ which in turn affect academic stability and success, it makes sense for public universities to make food more accessible for students. In state-sponsored schools that generate millions of dollars in revenue it is unimaginable that students would be going hungry on-campus. However, it is an unfortunate reality that every school year some students are not only unsure of how they will afford housing but also of how they will afford food. In struggling with getting these basic needs met many students' grades will start to suffer. SB 767 creates a safety net so that a basic necessity of life, food, is readily available for all students on-campus to receive without any barriers in place. In making sure that these basic needs are met colleges and universities put their students first which will only have a positive impact on their students' lives. When these basic needs are met one less stressor is in the way of attaining stability through higher education.

Students experiencing food insecurity often exist at the intersection of other marginalized identities that can further exacerbate the trauma of poverty. Youth, POC, TLGBQ+ students, students with children, and students at the intersections of these identities exist as particularly vulnerable communities who experience systemic barriers to accessing higher education and are often further victimized by housing insecurity, food insecurity, and poverty. These compounding oppression association with these identities can make it difficult to be present in class or complete coursework while trying to heal from trauma. In providing their lower-income students with tools that can create stability, as SB 767 would do, colleges simply make life easier and more equitable for students. The trauma of poverty should not stand as a barrier to receiving a quality education. No student should ever feel abandoned by their college because they cannot easily and readily attain food security. Many students struggle with food insecurity because of not only the shame that surrounds being impoverished but also because campuses do not have resources available to students. SB 767 puts the needs of impoverished students first, and helps to make their struggle less hidden and shameful. To create an equitable education environment the basic needs of every student should be met.

HPRP strongly urges the committee to issue a Favorable Report on SB 767.

Please contact Akyra Brown at abrown@hprplaw.org for additional information.

1. WASHINGTON POST, HOUSING AND FOOD INSECURITY AFFECTING MANY COLLEGE STUDENTS, AVAILABLE AT: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/02/20/housing-food-insecurity-affecting-many-college-students-new-data-says/>