



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 767

Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program - Established

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

March 9, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
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Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports SB 767, which aims to create a state-funded Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program administered by the Maryland Higher Education Commission to fund anti-hunger programs and initiatives on 2 and 4-year campuses. The Hunger-Free Campus Program will raise awareness of services available both on and off campus for food-insecure students by establish a stigma-free system for accessing community resources, and designate a staff member on campus to assist students with enrolling in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

College hunger is an issue that has often gone unseen and under-addressed. However, it is prevalent on even the most well-resourced campuses. A pre-pandemic study done by the Hope Center found that among 167,000 students surveyed from 171 two-year and 56 four-year institutions, 39% were food insecure in the prior 30 days.¹ Being food insecure is often compounded by other struggles of living in poverty, which can make achieving one's educational goals especially difficult.

Establishing the Hunger-Free Campus Program seeks to alleviate some of that burden by reducing the barriers students face when accessing much needed food resources. Designating a staff member to assist with navigating the SNAP application process will greatly increase SNAP participation for eligible students. The application process can be difficult to understand and having a trusted support system to provide guidance can be critical for participation in a program that is proven to lift people out of poverty. Additionally, ensuring that each institution will provide an on-campus pantry or a system which provides stigma-free access to existing community pantries will allow students and other low-income campus community members to quickly receive the assistance they need from a place they trust.

College students should be worried about their studies, not about their next meal. The Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program is a smart investment in Maryland's higher education system and will lay down the groundwork needed to continue addressing food insecurity in the future.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 767.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

¹ #RealCollege 2020: Five Years of Evidence on Campus Basic Needs Insecurity:
https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2019_RealCollege_Survey_Report.pdf