

The University of Maryland Student Government Association
Testimony for SB767
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, Tuesday, March 9, 2021
Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program
POSITION: FAVORABLE

My name is Dan Alpert and I am the Student Body President at the University of Maryland, College Park. I'd like to start by thanking Chair Pinsky and all the members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for the opportunity to share our thoughts on this bill. Thank you also to Senator Washington for introducing this legislation, which addresses the serious issue of food insecurity on college campuses.

A 2019 study conducted by the University of Maryland, College Park reported that 20% of UMD students qualified as food insecure and a further 21% were marginally food secure¹. These students reported difficulty focusing in class and were 15 times more likely to be "down or depressed" than food secure students. Food insecure students also had an average GPA 0.2 points below that of food secure students. The clear message this survey showcases is the correlation between food insecurity and the day-to-day actions of a university student.

Our University has taken steps to remedy these problems, such as establishing a campus food pantry, improving outreach and awareness, and providing other food-related resources. In fact, our campus pantry has been an incredible success and is now in the midst of a major upgrade in order to better serve our campus community. Our student government was proud to allocate \$47,000 in support of their expansion, which will allow our pantry to thousands of students and host cooking demos, which is a major step towards increasing food literacy and encouraging healthy eating. Despite all this, we must do more as a state to put an end to campus hunger.

This bill takes a number of steps towards addressing food insecurity on college campuses. First, by establishing a hunger task force on each campus, we can ensure that there are always advocates for our students who face food insecurity. Second, by designating a staff member responsible for hunger issues, campus community members will know where to go with questions and where to direct students experiencing food insecurity. This position will also help with connecting food insecure students to appropriate resources. And lastly, this bill provides incentives to our state's institutions to make ending campus hunger a priority.

This bill will protect our most vulnerable students by reducing the barriers to food security and ensure that they can focus on the most important part of college: their education. We urge a favorable report on the Hunger Free Campus Grant Program.

Sincerely,
Dan Alpert, *Student Body President*
Ben Baitman, *Director of Government Affairs*

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