

**Testimony of Deveraux Smith**  
**HB 1027, Food Supplement Benefits- Students- SNAP Eligibility**  
**Before the House Appropriations Committee**  
**March 10, 2022 1:00pm**

To: Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Deveraux Smith and I'm a Ph.D. student at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. I also serve as the Program Director for Retriever Essentials, which is a hub of resources that supports food-insecure students on our campus.

Today I'd like to share with you the story of a student who had to overcome tremendous odds to succeed academically and who benefited from programs like SNAP.

He grew up in the inner cities of Washington, D.C. and Prince Georges County where he was raised by a strong single mother in Section 8 housing, commonly known as the 'ghetto'. His mom struggled to put food on the table and afford basic living expenses. Many nights after school, he would fall asleep with an empty stomach. Other nights he would find some relief through SNAP benefits. Plagued by the hardships of the inner city— poverty, crime, violence, and homelessness— he was determined to beat the odds and provide a better life for his family.

He went on to graduate from high school and begin his college career at the Community College of Southern Maryland. During the college admissions process, he applied for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). As he filled out the forms, he was brought back to the reality that his family couldn't afford college as he indicated an income below the poverty line. Despite his financial hardships, he continued to press on, and by the grace of God, he received need-based grants, merit scholarships, and federal work-study benefits. Even with those means of support, he still struggled financially to balance his college expenses and provide for his family.

In the midst of his struggles, he would develop programs to support hungry and homeless students just like himself. His efforts just so happened to be recognized by elected officials and the President of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Dr. Freeman Hrabowski. Dr. Hrabowski offered the young man a ticket to his future through a full-ride scholarship to UMBC. He stepped foot on the campus with much zeal and determination to pursue his future, however, his present reality would once again become a reflection of his past struggles.

As he met with students from diverse cultures, backgrounds, races, and ethnicities he noticed a common thread that they, too, were suffering from food insecurity. The numbers were staggering with thousands of UMBC students struggling to afford food, and more than 167,000 food-insecure students nationwide.

The young man worked with the college administration to develop a comprehensive program called Retriever Essentials to provide students immediate assistance through a food pantry and connect them with more sustainable options like federal assistance programs such as SNAP benefits. These programs are needed now more than ever with the increasing financial uncertainty brought about by the pandemic.

I ask you to imagine just for a second that your child or another loved one was struggling to get food. Wouldn't you do everything in your power to help them? The story of the young man I shared with you today isn't hard for me to imagine because I am reminded of his story every day when I look in the mirror. That young man was me and there are thousands of students just like me. I am not only the Program Director for Retriever Essentials; I am also its Founder. I'm proud to stand before you today as an advocate for food-insecure students who are striving to succeed but just need a little help.

I ask you to lend a helping hand today and make sure all students enrolled in higher education get the SNAP resources they need and deserve to help them be successful. **For these reasons, I urge a favorable vote for HB 1027**