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FAVORABLE ON HB 1027

Testimony in Favor of House Bill 1027 (2022)

Food Supplement Benefits - Students - Eligibility (SNAP for Students)

Before the Appropriations Committee: March 10, 2022

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, and Committee Members,

House Bill 1027 would make permanent in Maryland the SNAP extension for higher education students that the federal government instituted during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will allow students who qualify individually for SNAP, but whose families do not, to receive SNAP benefits. This bill should be adopted because (1) food insecurity has devastating effects on higher education students, (2) food insecurity in universities harms the Maryland economy, (3) participating in work study jobs should not be required to receive SNAP benefits, and (4) expanding SNAP eligibility furthers the goal of the previously passed Hunger-Free Campus Bill. Voting favorably on HB1027 would continue the commitment made by Maryland to combat food insecurity in its higher education student population.

Food Insecurity has Especially Devastating Implications for Students in Higher Education

Food insecurity, or the lack of consistent access to enough food for an active and healthy life, has numerous health consequences for those who experience it, but it is especially devastating for students. Nutrition has an important effect on the brain, influencing learning ability and behavioral functions.¹ Studies have shown that college students consuming regular meals and recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables have higher grade-point averages

¹ Jennifer Dani, Courtney Burrill, Barbara Demmig-Adams, *The remarkable role of nutrition in learning and behaviour*. Nutrition & Food Science Vol 35.4 (2005).

(GPAs) and academic achievement overall.² A 2019 UMD study found that 20% of students surveyed were food insecure at some point in the 12 months preceding the survey, with 13% experiencing low levels of food security and 7% experiencing very low levels of food security. These food insecure students reported poorer general health, and experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, distress, anger, and loneliness than their peers. Further, food insecure students had lower GPAs and were more likely to withdraw from the University before completing their degrees. They also reported missing out on professional and social development opportunities (e.g., unpaid internships) which could have benefited their future career pursuits. Racial and ethnic minorities, including international students, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities are more likely to be food insecure, in comparison to their counterparts, widening already present disparities.³

Two of the best established and most easily quantified outcomes of college success are improved employment prospects and higher incomes. GPA remains a key factor for a student's trajectory after college. College grades are evaluated by gatekeepers for many opportunities, including graduate school, internships, fellowships, and job applications. The 2019 Job Outlook Survey found that 73% of potential employers screen job candidates by GPA.⁴ Moreover, most industries had a GPA cutoff, and students needed at least a B average before their résumé was considered. Recent graduates with a good GPA are more likely to land a job interview or have a chance to prove their qualifications. Conversely, those with a lower GPA could be forced to shift their job search to smaller markets or smaller companies and to accept lower salaries. Notably, early career struggles can have a long-term impact on career trajectory,⁵ which in turn impacts the local Maryland economy.

² Associations between Dietary Intake and Academic Achievement in College Students: A Systematic Review; Tracy L. Burrows, Megan C. Whatnall, Amanda J. Patterson, and Melinda J. Hutchesson; Healthcare (Basel); September 25, 2017; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5746694/>

³ UMD Food Access and Student Well-Being Study; UMD Division of Student Affairs Counseling Center; https://studentaffairs.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2021-11/Food%20Access%20%26%20Student%20Well-being%20Study%20Report_September2019.pdf

⁴ Do College Grades Predict Future Success?; Forbes; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2020/10/19/do-college-grades-predict-future-success/>.

⁵ Do College Grades Predict Future Success?; Forbes; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2020/10/19/do-college-grades-predict-future-success/>.

Food Insecurity in Higher Education Students Harms the Local Economy

In addition to having lower GPAs, food insecure students are far more likely to withdraw from higher education before completing their degrees, which comes with a multitude of adverse consequences.⁶ Typically, people with only a high school degree are roughly twice as likely to be unemployed as are bachelor's degree holders of the same age.⁷ Substantial and persistent earnings benefits are likewise well-established, and these economic benefits extend not only to individuals but to the local economy as a whole. College-educated workers spend more time in the workforce and display higher productivity while working. The average bachelor's degree holder contributes \$278,000 more to local economies than the average high school graduate through direct spending over the course of their lifetime. Additionally, bachelor's degree holders pay \$44,000 more in local and state taxes over their lifetimes, thus contributing thousands of dollars more towards government services and social insurance programs.⁸

Bachelor's degree holders are also 47% more likely to have health insurance provided through their job, and their employers contribute 74% more to their health coverage.⁹ From those with bachelor's degrees in comparison to those only completing high school, employment in the nonprofit sector is twice as likely, volunteering is 2.3 times more likely, and the estimated value of volunteer labor is 4.1 times (\$1,300 annually) greater. Also significant, voting and political involvement are significantly higher. Community involvement is also significantly greater in other ways.¹⁰

⁶ UMD Food Access and Student Well-Being Study; UMD Division of Student Affairs Counseling Center; https://studentaffairs.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2021-11/Food%20Access%20%26%20Student%20Well-being%20Study%20Report_September2019.pdf

⁷ How does a college degree improve graduates' employment and earnings potential?; APLU; <https://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/college-costs-tuition-and-financial-aid/publicvalues/employment-earnings.html>

⁸ What colleges do for local economies: A direct measure based on consumption; Jonathen Rothwell; <https://www.brookings.edu/research/what-colleges-do-for-local-economies-a-direct-measure-based-on-consumption/>.

⁹ How does a college degree improve graduates' employment and earnings potential?; APLU; <https://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/college-costs-tuition-and-financial-aid/publicvalues/employment-earnings.html>.

¹⁰ IT'S NOT JUST THE MONEY THE BENEFITS OF COLLEGE EDUCATION TO INDIVIDUALS AND TO SOCIETY; Philip Trostel Margaret Chase Smith; <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf>.

Thus, Maryland and its taxpayers have a very strong incentive to boost college students' GPA, attendance, and completion rates.

Requiring Students to Participate in Work Study to Receive SNAP Benefits is an Unnecessary Obstacle

House Bill 1027 makes permanent the SNAP expansion granted under federal COVID-19 regulations, removing unnecessary obstacles for students to receive SNAP benefits.

Traditionally, only college students who participate in work study programs can receive SNAP benefits. Under the federal COVID-19 rule and this bill, students who qualify but do not participate in work study programs may also receive SNAP benefits, even if they do not accept a work study job. There are many reasons why students who qualify for work study would not participate but still need SNAP benefits and should receive them. Many Maryland work study jobs pay students only \$12.50 hourly.¹¹ Compared to service sector jobs where students can earn tips, work study compensation is not competitive, and students need to maximize their working hours. Further, students report they often do not use work study because there are not enough interesting positions open on campus. Freshmen particularly are often hesitant to begin working right away out of fear of overfilling their schedule or jeopardizing their performance in school.¹² Work study positions also have a maximum number of hours students may work,¹³ further limiting student income potential and steering them towards off campus jobs. Thus, a student's decision not to participate in work study is likely an indication of a greater need for assistance and this decision should not exclude such students from SNAP benefits.

HB1027 will Further the Goals of the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program that Went into Effect October 2021

The Maryland legislature demonstrated a desire to eliminate food insecurity on college campuses when it passed the Maryland Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program bill in 2021. The

¹¹ Loyola University of Maryland Office of Financial Aid, Federal Work-Study Academic Year 2021-2022; <https://www.loyola.edu/departments/financial-aid/undergraduate/programs/student-employment>

¹² Officials use survey to find out why students aren't using federal work-study aid; Rebecca Leppert; The GW Hatchet; February 22, 2018; <https://www.gwhatchet.com/2018/02/22/officials-use-survey-to-find-out-why-students-arent-using-federal-work-study-aid/>

¹³ How Many Hours May a Student Work?; Bates Student Employment Office; <https://www.bates.edu/student-employment/for-supervisors/policies/how-many-hours-may-a-student-work/>

program, now codified in the Maryland Constitution,¹⁴ created a state-funded matching grant program that provides higher education institutions with funding to address food insecurity in their campus communities. In part, the law requires all public four-year institutions in the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to designate staff members responsible for informing students about SNAP eligibility, assisting students in enrolling in SNAP, and providing options for students to utilize SNAP benefits at campus retailers or off-campus retailers that accept the benefits. HB1027 would further the goal of the 2021 Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program by making more deserving students eligible for SNAP.¹⁵

Conclusion

Extending SNAP eligibility to a greater number of higher education students in need would greatly improve the health and well-being of these students, and benefit the Maryland community and economy as a whole. Because of the well-established association between lack of access to healthy food and depressed GPAs and dropout rates, food insecurity can have a devastating impact on the lives of higher education students. Supporting the population of food-insecure students that currently are ineligible for assistance will increase the number of students who finish college, allowing them to attain better jobs and all that comes with that success.

We commend the commitment this legislature made in the 2021 Maryland Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program to reduce food insecurity among higher education students. We urge the committee to extend the benefits of that Program to the deserving students who have fallen through the cracks, by adopting a favorable report for House Bill 1027.

¹⁴ Article II, Section 17(c), Chapter 579 Maryland Constitution

¹⁵ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2021RS/fnotes/bil_0001/hb0891.pdf