

HB 452

Food Supplement Benefits – Students – Eligibility (SNAP for Students) House Appropriations Committee February 21, 2023

SUPPORT

House Bill 452 provides state-funded food assistance benefits to students enrolled in colleges and universities for at least 15 credit hours per year and for who their expected family contribution for FAFSA is \$0 or for who are eligible for a state or federal work study program.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders are at risk of food insecurity. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, including communities of color. The causes of food insecurity are complex and often include additional factors such as low income, lack of reliable transportation, and access to healthcare.

The Maryland Food Bank knows that higher education is a demonstrated pathway out of hunger. Yet for many Marylanders, higher education is out of reach due to barriers such as financial affordability, household and familial obligations, and logistical concerns including transportation and affordable housing. Through our College Pantry Program, we establish and support food pantries in partnership with colleges and universities, focusing on healthy food options as well as supports to lift students out of poverty, including workforce development opportunities, public benefit application assistance, and grant dollars for non-food resources such as toiletries and “remain in school” emergency funds. The Maryland Food Bank is also a recognized SNAP outreach partner, so our work on campuses will only be enhanced by the continued and regular availability of SNAP benefits supported by the state.

By assisting with their food needs, HB 452 frees up time and worry for students to focus on completing their education – for whatever reasons and motivations the student may have. Having the state pick up the cost of SNAP benefits for students removes any potential for political fluctuation at the federal level - of which the state has little control over. Additionally, and most basically, food assistance benefits are a simple and proven effective method to combatting hunger. Students are often an overlooked population for food insecurity efforts, yet the impact of assisting this group far outweighs any upfront cost in terms of the benefit of higher education to the student, their family, and their community.

The Maryland Food Bank appreciates your consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 452.