



EDUCATION, ENERGY, and the ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Senate Bill 353
Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program - Alterations
February 22, 2023
Favorable

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and committee members, UMBC is grateful for this opportunity to express our insights regarding Senate Bill 353. Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program – Alterations. The grant opportunities offered with this bill widen the capacity of institutions like ours to meet the needs of our students. Too many students at UMBC are experiencing food or housing insecurity, and sometimes living unsheltered. Nationally, up to 50% of students reporting that their academics have been affected by not having enough food, based on a 2018 study by Broton & Goldrick-Rab.

Food insecurity is a problem that extends beyond UMBC. Estimates put rates of food insecurity at 30-50% on college campuses nationally. Although the trope of a starving student living off of ramen is pervasive and even joked about, the consequences can be serious. Students experiencing food insecurity report negative effects on their physical, mental, and academic health including heightened levels of anxiety and depression, weight changes and disordered eating habits, an inability to stay awake or concentrate in class, and social isolation and withdrawal from their peers. This burden falls unequally on already marginalized students including students of color, first-generation students, and students with disabilities, and represents a barrier to equitable access to education.

I work as Program Coordinator of Retriever Essentials, UMBC's food access network supported by our Division of Student Affairs. We offer many resources, including, but not limited to, a free grocery store staffed by four Federal Work Study Students, a weekly farmers market supplied with free recovered food by So What Else, a Save-a-Swipe meal swipe donation program, and mini-pantries. In 2022, our program relied on 1,500 hours of volunteer hours and distributed 38,600 lbs of donated or recovered food via 4,195 bags to UMBC students, faculty, and staff who required the extra support, more than seven times our 2021 total of 5,279 lbs. From the data we collected, it is clear that many international students and graduate students use our resources. In particular, international students on F-1 visas, many of whom are also facing housing insecurity and difficulty finding employment, rely on Retriever Essentials. To support these students, we rely heavily on our volunteers and 100% on ad hoc support in the form of monetary and in-kind donations.

The program and grant outlined in Senate Bill 353 would greatly help our efforts, ensuring that our program would not have to rely mainly on volunteer hours and donations to operate a program *necessary* at UMBC to meet students' basic needs.

Thank you for allowing UMBC to share our favorable position on Senate Bill 353.

UMBC was established upon the land of the Piscataway Conoy and Susquehannock peoples. Over time, citizens of many more Indigenous nations have come to reside in this region. We humbly offer our respects to all past, present, and future Indigenous people connected to this place.