



INFORMATIONAL TESTIMONY FOR HOUSE BILL 407
Food Supplement Benefits - Students - Eligibility (SNAP for Students)
Appropriations
March 12, 2024

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the House Appropriations Committee,

My name is Brielle Pinzini. I am the Anti-Hunger Program Assistant for Maryland Hunger Solutions, a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to end hunger in Maryland by improving participation in the federal nutrition programs. For over ten years, MD Hunger Solutions has provided application assistance to any Marylander trying to apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP. We provide this service both in-person and over-the-phone, where our toll-free hotline receives 400-500 calls per month from Marylanders seeking assistance. In addition, Maryland Hunger Solutions leads a coalition of over 30 colleges and universities around the state of Maryland fighting food insecurity on campus by increasing access to SNAP and emergency food resources.

To qualify for SNAP benefits, college students in Maryland must demonstrate that they participate in a state or federally financed work study program and/or work at least 20 hours per week in paid employment (unless they meet another qualifying exemption¹). During the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic, these “work requirements” for college students were waived, which meant that SNAP access for students was greatly increased. In 2023, this waiver expired, and college students were once again required to demonstrate a minimum amount of work or work-study to qualify. The expiration of this waiver coincided with the expiration of waivers for “able-bodied adults without dependents” (ABAWDs), who now must also demonstrate a minimum amount of work hours each month in order to qualify for SNAP.²

HB 407 would once again waive the student work requirement and make SNAP available to all Maryland residents enrolled in a higher education institution for at least 15 credit hours per year as long as: (1) their expected family contribution is \$0 on the most recent free application for federal student aid (FAFSA), or (2) the student is eligible to participate in the state or federally financed work study program. This bill works towards directly supporting the food security of university students by removing barriers to SNAP participation.

In 2018, the University of Maryland found that 20% of the surveyed students were food insecure.³ Food-insecure students were found to more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds (i.e., first-generation college students, racial/gender minorities, and financially vulnerable students), and this food insecurity negatively impacted their academic performance, retention, and well-being. Furthermore, in 2023, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) at the U.S. Department of Education released nationally representative data collected in 2020, that mirrored similar percentages of college students experiencing food insecurity: 23% of undergraduates, and 12% of graduate students.⁴ The guidelines for

¹ USDA Food and Nutrition Service, 2023. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/students>

² Again, unless they qualify for an exemption. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/work-requirements>

³ <https://studentaffairs.umd.edu/food-access-student-well-being-study>

⁴ The Hope Center, 2023. <https://hope.temple.edu/npsas>



extending SNAP benefits to higher education students laid out in HB 407 would mean that a greater number of university students in Maryland would be eligible for SNAP and would directly benefit from the increased food access that SNAP provides.

Beyond increasing access to SNAP for college students, we at Maryland Hunger Solutions urge legislators to improve SNAP benefit adequacy by increasing the minimum monthly benefit in our state. Increasing the minimum benefit would improve access to food for college students along with other individuals and families in Maryland struggling to make ends meet.

To conclude, Maryland Hunger Solutions appreciates the opportunity to inform the conversation around HB 407. We welcome the opportunity to work with legislators, the Maryland State Department of Education, the Department of Human Services, and colleges and universities around the state to expand access to and participation in SNAP.