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FAVORABLE – HB 407
Food Supplement Benefits - Students - Eligibility (SNAP for Students)
Hearing of the House Appropriations Committee – March 12, 2024
Kemmesha Thomas, Homeless Persons Representation Project

The Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc. (HPRP) is a non-profit civil legal services organization that provides free legal representation to people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness on legal issues that will lead to an end to homelessness. HPRP regularly represents individuals and families in accessing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits through administrative appeals and advocacy. HPRP's Homeless Youth Initiative serves young adults, including college students experiencing food insecurity and housing instability or homelessness. HB 470 requires the Maryland Department of Human Services to provide SNAP benefits to students who are residents of the State, are enrolled in an institution of higher education for at least 15 credit hours per year, whose family contribution is expected to be \$0, and who are eligible to participate in a certain work study program.

Despite the availability of financial aid through programs like the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), college students often face significant financial challenges.

At times financial aid does not fully cover the cost-of-living expenses for students; especially if they are attending college in high-cost areas or have other financial obligations causing students struggle to afford basic necessities such as groceries. 31% of undergraduate Pell grant recipients reported low or very low food security.¹ Research indicates anywhere from 35% to 42% of college students experience food insecurity at some point during their academic careers.² Among students who are food insecure there is an overrepresentation of former foster youth, racial and ethnic minorities, and first-generation college students.³ Across two- and four-year institutions, 75% of Indigenous, 70% of Black, and 70% of American Indian or Alaska Native students experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness.⁴ Student who are food insecure are more likely to not complete their degree⁵, have GPAs that are significantly lower than their counterpart, have worse physical and mental wellbeing and are more often to turn down professional development opportunities compared to their food secured peers.⁶

Addressing food insecurity in college students is important for reasons:

- 1) **Increased Academic Achievement and Graduation Rates:** Adequate nutrition is essential for cognitive function, concentration, and memory—all of which are crucial for academic success.⁷ Food-insecure students may struggle to focus on class, retain information, and perform well on exams, leading to lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates.⁵ By addressing food insecurity and providing support services to students in need, colleges and universities can improve retention rates and increase the likelihood that students will complete their degree.
- 2) **Economic Mobility:** Higher education is increasingly important for economic mobility and career opportunities. Addressing food insecurity among college students can enhance the workforce by increasing the number of qualified and skillful individuals.⁸

- 3) Improvement of well-being: By ensuring that students have access to nutritious food HB407 can reduce healthcare costs and improve the well-being of community members.⁹

Allowing students to receive SNAP benefits is a compassionate anti-poverty policy, as well as cost effective. The short-term costs are outweighed by long-term economic gains and improved individual and community public health.

HPRP strongly urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 407. If you have any questions, please contact Kemma Thomas at kthomas@hprplaw.org or (443)884-2213, or Ingrid Lofgren at ilofgren@hprplaw.org or (410)656-9975.

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