



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM: ADVOCACY
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
BEFORE THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE SUPPORTING
HB 407, SNAP FOR STUDENTS
ON TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2024**

FAVORABLE

Honorable Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

The Critical Issues Forum: Advocacy for Social Justice (CIF) supports the “SNAP for Students” bill - HB 407.

Composed of Temple Beth Ami, Kol Shalom, and Adat Shalom, CIF is a coalition of synagogues with over 1,750 families. CIF is a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on policy issues that relate to our shared values, including the Jewish tradition’s emphasis on the primary value of human life.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 407, to make college students eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits who are residents of Maryland, are enrolled in an institution of higher education for at least 15 credit hours per year, and whose family contribution is expected to be \$0 or who are eligible to participate in a Maryland or federally financed work study program. We thank Delegate Kaufman and his 40 colleagues for sponsoring this important legislation.

Under current federal law, otherwise eligible students must meet the “work-to-eat” rule that requires them to work a paid job or participate in work study for at least 20 hours a week in order to receive SNAP benefits. This counter-productive and outdated rule exacerbates the serious problem of food insecurity among college students, including in Maryland. The Food Research and Action Center recently published a Research Brief explaining the need to expand SNAP eligibility among college students. Food Fuels Futures: Expanded SNAP Eligibility Reduces Hunger Among College Students, <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Food-Fuels-Futures-Research-Brief.pdf>.

Food insecurity among college students is real, pervasive, and consequential. With the right

combination of programs, political will and investments, however, we can effectively eliminate it.¹ The basic need to have enough food to survive and function without shame is widespread and often hidden. This includes students attending Maryland's prestigious community colleges and universities who struggle with chronic and sometimes transitory "limited or uncertain access to adequate food."² In addition to the critical human importance of just having access to enough food for an active, healthy life for our students, food security has an economic value to better secure an educated workforce and Maryland's return on its investment in higher education.

A National Institute of Health study on food insecurity and student success at Maryland's community colleges documented that food insecurity is an issue at rural, suburban, and urban community colleges. The study represented 37% of Maryland community colleges and over 55,000 potential community college student enrollments.³ Community college students include traditional 18-20 aged learners, as well as adult learners who benefit from a community college education as a pathway to "establishing or maintaining a middle-class status" and economic security.⁴ Additional studies have shown that food insecurity among community college students has a significant relationship with academic success, GPA, concentration levels, and energy levels.^{5,6}

According to a pre-pandemic study, an estimated 20% of students at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMDCP), Maryland's flagship university and one of the nation's preeminent public research universities, are food-insecure. These students are at-risk for adverse well-being, academic performance, and professional/career development. Food-insecure students reported poorer general health and experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, distress, anger, and loneliness than their peers. Compared to their counterparts, food-insecure students had lower GPAs and were more likely to withdraw from the University before completing their degrees. Moreover, food insecurity disproportionately affected certain college students, including first-generation college students, racial/ethnic minority students, transfer students, students with a disability, as well as students who worked longer hours and were financially independent. Many students in need may not seek help because of stigma or difficulty accessing needed resources at off-campus pantries.⁷

HB 407 - "SNAP for Students," will increase Maryland's efforts to address food insecurity among college students. SNAP is a federal program that provides nutrition benefits to needy families so they can purchase healthy food. The SNAP for Students bill is a critical step that would allow students to be eligible for SNAP benefits if they are eligible for work-study or have a zero-dollar expected family contribution, including if they are receiving the maximum Pell Grant. In addition, this bill would make permanent the temporary expansion of SNAP eligibility enacted by Congress in December 2020 that expired on July 1, 2023.

We support HB 407 because it addresses a critical issue in Maryland and our country. A recent report published by the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior showed that nearly 60% of students attending a state university reported experiencing food insecurity, potentially affecting college students' cognitive, academic, and psychosocial development.⁸ Nationally, nearly one-third to one-half of college students experience high rates of food insecurity, a rate higher than the national average for adults.^{9,10} The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice issued a report on March 31, 2021 that determined that food insecurity affected 39% of students at two-year institutions and 29% of students at four-year institutions.¹¹

While wide variation in these rates exists, it is clear that food insecurity is a health, economic justice, and equity issue: data show that students of color, older students, former foster youth, parenting

students, students who experienced childhood food insecurity, students receiving financial aid, working students, students experiencing housing instability or living off-campus, students lacking access to a vehicle, students with poor health status, and first-generation college students are especially at higher risk of food insecurity.¹²⁻²² Further, food insecurity during college can be a barrier to graduation and higher-degree attainment, particularly for first-generation students, thus shaping the entire future of a student.²³

No student should deal with the additional burden of food security while pursuing higher education.

Education at all levels has become more challenging as we continue dealing with the learning consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴ Experiencing food insecurity among Maryland college students is something we can remediate. SNAP is a proven intervention, yet utilization is far from universal among those eligible. Existing policies and programs like SNAP that help mitigate food insecurity should be expanded and made more accessible to the college student population. Now is an opportune time to make important investments in Maryland's future as we emerge from the pandemic recession.

We urge you to support Delegate Kaufman's "SNAP for Students" bill to address the epidemic of hunger for students attending Maryland's colleges and universities. Common sense will help support the advancement, economic security, and health of our young adults and future leaders!

The Critical Issues Forum requests that the Committee favorably refer HB 407.

References:

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