

Tessa Cone, Retrievers Essentials - UMBC

Regarding Maryland House Bill HB0407

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My name is Tessa Cone and I am an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County (UMBC). I am currently a social work intern at Retrievers Essentials, our free food program at UMBC. I connect food insecure students to resources on and off campus, including SNAP.

I would like to tell you about two students. John Doe, who built up the courage to tell his parents that he is gay. They responded by kicking him out of their house and withdrawing all financial support. He was desperately looking for a job while homeless. Jane Doe, who was on financial aid, was taking a full course load and didn't have the time or energy for a part-time job. What did these students have in common? They were not eligible for SNAP due to the employment requirement. Homeless students and students taking an overload of courses to minimize student loan debt are not eligible for food assistance through SNAP.

I am sick of telling students that there is little I can do for them beyond a referral to a food pantry. I need you to understand that the employment eligibility requirement makes SNAP inaccessible to many food insecure students. Research has shown that food insecurity is twice as prevalent among college students as the general public. This is due to the high cost of living and tuition, as well as the amount of time and energy students must invest to be academically successful. Expecting full-time students to be employed 20 hours a week is completely unrealistic. A full-time student would have a 65 hour work week. How can we expect students to focus on their education when they can't meet their basic needs? We should be encouraging and empowering students to finish their degrees so that they do not get caught in the cycle of poverty.

Passing HB0407 will ensure that students who are food insecure get access to the resources they need, and that students are able to focus on their education, rather than worrying about their next meal or how long they can go without eating. All people deserve the chance to better their lives through higher education, but we must fix this unjust eligibility requirement if we expect people to complete their degrees and become successful members of society.

I hope that you consider the positive implications the passing of HB0407 will have for all Maryland college students. Your consideration of these matters and solutions is very much appreciated.