
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 407
Food Supplement Benefits - Students - Eligibility (SNAP for Students)
Appropriations Committee
March 12, 2024

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports HB 407, which requires the Department of Human Services to provide food supplement benefits to Maryland residents who are students in higher education enrolled with 15 or more credit hours, are eligible for a work-study program, and lack financial support from their family.

HB 407 seeks to alleviate the challenges of food insecurity among higher education students by offering financial support through a new state Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefit. This legislation reduces stress over food disparities, giving students access to a wider array of affordable and nutritious options and promoting healthier choices that foster overall well-being. HB 407 not only provides immediate relief, but it also leads to a pathway toward sustainability and long-term success. Every student should have equity in the pursuit of thriving academically, and HB 407 supports that.

HB 407 could help prevent food insecurity for over 100,000 Maryland students - including me. The U.S. (United States) Government Accountability Office estimated that 7.3 million U.S. college students had household incomes below the level that would qualify them for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, but only 2.26 million enrolled in SNAP benefits.ⁱ Unsurprisingly, researchers have found that food insecurity rates among college students ranged from 20 to 50% over the last decade, which is higher than the 12% rate of the total U.S. population.ⁱⁱ The changing demographics of college students in the U.S., with a significantly higher percentage coming from lower- income households,ⁱⁱⁱ together with far lower participation rates in SNAP magnify the food insecurity among students in higher education.

As a low-income student who has personally experienced the struggle against food insecurity, I can attest to the assistance power of supplement benefits. Passing HB 407 not only enhances higher education students' academic success but also fosters self-autonomy. Graduating and entering the workforce increased my economic security and my ability to contribute to my family's well-being rather than having to rely on public aid to make ends meet. This approach empowers students to achieve their career goals, reducing the burden on welfare systems.



Food insecurity perpetuates the cycle of poverty and enhances the depths of inequity. Today, a post-secondary degree is often a requirement to enter the workforce. Studies indicate that food insecurity creates a higher chance for students dropping out of classes or institutions entirely. HB 407 will create a gateway to more equity and successful outcomes for higher-education students.

In conclusion, I urge the Committee to support this bill as a pivotal step toward addressing food insecurities in students pursuing higher education. HB 407 in turn, will foster equity in higher education. By providing access to the necessary resources for survival, we can empower students to excel academically and make a significant societal impact. This is not just about individual successes and meeting needs but about building a stronger, more fair society.

ⁱ US Government Accountability Office. (December 2018). Food insecurity: better information could help eligible college students access federal food assistance benefits.

ⁱⁱ Freudenberg N, Goldrick-Rab S, Poppen Dieck J. College Students and SNAP: The New Face of Food Insecurity in the United States. *Am J Public Health*. 2019 Dec;109(12):1652-1658. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2019.305332. Epub 2019 Oct 17. PMID: 31622149; PMCID: PMC6836795.

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. GAO. (December 2018).