

March 6, 2024

Vathani Logendran
vathan1@umbc.edu
(541) 231-1348

Ariel Barbosa
avbarbos@umbc.edu
(443) 791-5448



House Appropriations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

HB 407 Food Supplement Benefits – Students – Eligibility (SNAP for Students)

We are university students and co-leaders of Retriever Essentials, a free food initiative created by the partnership of students, staff, and faculty to try to combat food insecurity in our university community. We are submitting this written testimony to wholeheartedly state our support of the HB0 407 bill to provide food supplement benefits to university students who are taking at least 15 credit hours per year. We work with many students who have been denied eligibility to SNAP benefits because they are full time students that are unable to meet the 20 hours of the work eligibility requirement. Therefore, they do not have access to a sustainable source of food and many of them struggle to get by. Many of our students have zero dollar family contributions, and are attempting to pay for tuition, rent, books, and other basic needs while going to school full time, and not having family to fall back on.

Retriever Essentials is a donation based program with only one full-time staff member and many volunteers and stipend students to make up for the students' ineligibility to SNAP benefits due to the work eligibility requirement. We are overworking to make up for students' exclusion from federal aid access. Our efforts include:

1. Free food store called The Essential Space
2. Weekly free farmers market partnered with food recovery organization So What Else
3. Meal recovery initiative from our dining services
4. Meal swipe recovery through dining services
5. Recovering catered food through a community GroupMe chat
6. Gardening initiative to grow and provide fresh produce
7. Other groups on campus, such as our mental health providers, are also providing the support they can to students who can't access basic needs

We are first generation Americans, and women of color, and it pains us to see so many students in these demographics being denied access to basic needs, while also pursuing an education to make a positive impact on marginalized communities.

Retriever Essentials strongly urges the House Appropriations Committee to pass HB 407.