



Mission: *To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy* **Vision:**
Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR WITH AMENDMENTS

House Bill 0774

Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program - Alterations

By: Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA)

February 20, 2025

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of House Bill 0774 with amendments.

A 2023 survey of students at the University of Maryland, College Park found that 27% of respondents were experiencing food insecurity. This percentage is growing as tuition, housing, and food prices rise. “Food-insecure students were far likelier than their food-secure counterparts to report depression or anxiety, struggling to meet deadlines or attend class, and avoiding social interactions because of an inability to afford a meal out.¹ They also suffered career-related consequences, as many couldn’t pursue an unpaid internship or had to take jobs that didn’t further their professional goals simply to make ends meet.”¹

Food-insecure students are more likely to be female, students of color, former foster youth, low-income, disabled, in poor health, first-generation college attenders, attending a community college, transfer students, and students who are on their own financially.

Two- and four-year public colleges across Maryland are recognizing this growing disparity and have set up programs like on-campus food pantries, discounts at farmers’ markets, food recovery programs, and meal-sharing programs (Save-a-swipe). Some community colleges even have “navigators” to help students apply for benefits like SNAP; however, many students are on their own to navigate the extremely complex application process. Please note that most Maryland community colleges do not have on-campus food services, so they are unable to implement programs like food recovery and meal sharing. These programs are largely the result of students, faculty, and staff volunteering their time and money to ensure that all enrolled students have access to food and, therefore, equitable access to an education.

¹ <https://today.umd.edu/survey-returns-to-measure-food-insecurity-among-umd-students>

We respectfully request that this bill increase the amount appropriated to \$250,000. Second, we request that you remove the section requiring a minimum grant of \$25,000. Coming up with matching funding from colleges is no simple task. Students and volunteers largely run these programs on shoestring budgets. For example, UMBC, a large university, was recently awarded \$20,000 from the grant because it could not come up with additional matching funds. Campuses, like small community colleges, should not be excluded from obtaining grant funds simply because they can't meet the \$25,000 threshold. The 15% take-back for administering the grant fund seems unnecessary as there is already a cost-sharing requirement. Finally, the requirement that the Commission report to the governor "demographic data of students benefiting from the program" implies that campus programs will have to collect and report these data as a condition of receiving the grant. Food insecurity is already heavily stigmatized. It is difficult to get those in need to accept help. Those of us developing these programs are trying to avoid creating barriers to students accessing these programs. There are other ways to identify the demographics of food insecure students.

The Maryland Public Health Association urges the Committee to support HB0774 with amendments that would bring it into alignment with SB0789.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

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