



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM: ADVOCACY
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
BEFORE THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE SUPPORTING
HB1090 - FOOD SUPPLEMENT BENEFITS - STUDENTS – ELIGIBILITY
ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2025**

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 “Food Supplement Benefits - Students – Eligibility” Bill - HB 1090.

Comprised 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 and consequently being food secure.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1090, to require the Maryland Department of Human Services to provide food supplement benefits to Maryland resident students enrolled in an institution of higher education in Maryland who participates in a federal or Maryland work study program; and, requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to add a question to the Maryland College Aid Processing System application to ascertain whether the student has missed a meal because of an inability to afford the meal. We thank Delegate Solomon and his colleagues for sponsoring this important legislation.

Food insecurity among college students is real, pervasive, and consequential.^{1,2,3,4} With the right combination of programs, political will and investments, however, we can effectively eliminate it.⁵ 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.”⁶ 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.⁷ 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.^{9, 10}

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.¹¹

We support HB 1090 because it addresses a critical issue in Maryland and our country. HB 1090 will increase Maryland's efforts to address food insecurity among college students. The bill is a critical step, albeit limited, that would allow students to receive much needed food benefits for the entire academic year. 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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶⁻²⁶ 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.²⁷

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.²⁸ Experiencing food insecurity among Maryland college students is something we can remediate. Existing food security policies and programs that help mitigate the untoward consequences of 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.

We urge you to support Delegate Solomon's food supplement benefits to college students – House Bill 1090 to address the epidemic of hunger for students attending Maryland's colleges and universities. Support for the advancement, food security, and health of our young adults and future leaders is essential!

The Critical Issues Forum requests that the Committee favorably refer HB 1090.

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