



**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

**House Bill 774**

**Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program - Alterations**

**February 25, 2025**

**Favorable**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on House Bill 774. The bill requires the Governor, beginning in FY 2027, to allocate grant funding to any 4-year or 2-year public institutions of higher education or regional center to address hunger and food insecurity on campus. In return, each eligible institution pledges a matching contribution to be used to implement the goals of the program, including \$25,000 in cash or in-kind contribution. College campuses across the nation have seen increased numbers of students experiencing hunger or housing insecurity.

The University System of Maryland (USM) is composed of twelve distinguished institutions and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the state. Each of USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

Students' basic needs, including access to sufficient food and safe, adequate housing promotes sustained mental and physical well-being in order to study. Affordable technology and transportation; resources for personal hygiene; and childcare and related needs do not fall far behind. All USM institutions have programs addressing food insecurity including food pantries, emergency funds, and other programs to help students meet their most basic needs. House Bill 774 would help enhance the institutions' efforts to mitigate the heightened prevalence of hunger on campus, and the detrimental outcomes associated with students not having a secure source of food.

Programs such as [Retriever Essentials](#) at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, the [Hawk Shares](#) program at the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, or [Food for the Flock](#) at Salisbury University are just a few examples of holistic programs at USM institutions that leverage resources to raise awareness around hunger on campus. Moreover, food insecurity is a predictor of persistence and retention and should be a concern for universities, especially those serving large numbers of students in higher-risk populations. Being able to meet those students' needs will help increase their opportunities for success at USM institutions and beyond.

Thank you for allowing the USM to share our support for House Bill 774.



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