



TESTIMONY FOR HB 774 – SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program – Alterations

House Appropriations Committee

February 25th, 2025

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice-Chair Chang, and Members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Brielle Pinzini. I am the Anti-Hunger Program Assistant for Maryland Hunger Solutions, a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to end hunger in Maryland by improving participation in federal nutrition programs.

On behalf of Maryland Hunger Solutions, I offer our support with amendments regarding **HB0774**. For over ten years, Maryland Hunger Solutions has provided application assistance to any Marylander trying to apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). We provide this service both in-person and over-the-phone, where our toll-free hotline receives 300-400 calls per month from Marylanders seeking assistance. In addition, Maryland Hunger Solutions leads a coalition of over 30 colleges and universities around the state of Maryland fighting food insecurity on campus, focused on strengthening access to SNAP and emergency food resources for students, staff, and surrounding community members.

As written, HB0774 does not consider the full impact these proposed alterations would have on Maryland public institutions of Higher Education or how they would negatively affect current grant program participation. Based on the feedback we have collected from the Hunger-Free Campus Coalition partners, we are suggesting the amendments below:

- Remove the \$25,000 required matching minimum contribution for first-time recipients.
- Remove the increase in personal data collection of students benefiting from the program and its inclusion of specific demographic data.
- Remove the increase in administrative changes asked of the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) and the added administrative fee retention of 15%, therefore technically making the grant funding available to campuses: \$191,250.

We support the bill's increase in funding to the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program beginning in FY 2027, and we urge that HB0774 be made stronger by incorporating the amendments listed above.

The potential impact of this legislation would be an amplification of the current program and a step towards acknowledging food security on every campus as a public health concern. According to the most recent GAO report on college student food insecurity on a national scale, an estimated 1 in 4 students experience food insecurity while enrolled.¹ Hungry students have a harder time learning, and food insecurity has been tied to lower rates of matriculation. Providing support for building campus food security in Maryland is a long-term investment in future taxpayers, as college graduates tend to contribute more taxes over their lifetime.²

The Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program provides funding for public institutions of higher education, working towards strengthening food security in their community. At its current rate of funding, the program allotment does not match the significant interest from campus applicants and growing need on campuses across Maryland. The current program provides \$150,000 in annually appropriated funds. Over the last three cycles—funding has been administered to about 11 Maryland campuses. This amount is roughly one-third of eligible Maryland public campuses, having been successfully awarded funds.

The first year the grant program was implemented, requests totaled nearly \$450,000, but available program funding only allotted for a third of that amount. Each year, the total of campus requests for the grant has surpassed the amount of appropriated funding. Over the past three cycles, the average campus award has consistently ranged between \$10,000 and \$20,000.

Additionally, the required matching contribution for campus applicants has been a major barrier for Maryland’s smaller, more rural campuses, as well as our Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Most campuses apply for the grant with in-kind contributions. Additionally, we have seen at least one smaller, rural campus in Carroll County refuse the entirety of funds awarded because they could not meet the program’s matching requirement with their campus resources. As part of the current grant program’s requirements, the Carroll County campus shared the results of their food insecurity

¹ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Estimated Eligibility and Receipt Among Food Insecure College Students, 2024 .
<https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-107074>

² APLU. (2024, July 31). How do college graduates benefit society at large? - APLU. https://www.aplu.org/our-work/4-policy-and-advocacy/publicvalues/societal-benefits/#:~:text=Because%20college%20graduates%20typically%20earn,than%20a%20high%20school%20graduate.&text=All%20told%2C%20an%20average%20bachelor's_degree%20is%20a%20bachelor's%20degree.&text=Public%20universities%20also%20play%20a_who%20advance%20the%20national%20interest.&text=1.,Just%20the%20Money%2C%E2%80%9D%202015.



survey, noting roughly 50% of their students responded they could not afford balanced, healthy meals. While 26% of students identified they skipped meals or cut the size of their meals because they did not have enough money for food .

Furthermore, the survey and data collection requirement for the current program has also proven to be a significant administrative hinderance, as every campus values protecting the personal and sensitive data of its students.

Maryland Hunger Solutions believes additional funding for the Hunger- Free Campus Grant Program, and less administrative barriers would allow for greater participation from interested campuses and allow for even greater impact with assisting students where other support programs may prove difficult.

As a SNAP Outreach provider and leading member of the Maryland Hunger-Free Campus Coalitions, we have had the unique perspective of observing the growth of the program, while also supporting campus efforts. Campus awardees have been able to build the infrastructure that has a resounding effect on the community that surrounds them. They have been able to hire additional part-time staff members, open additional pantry locations or extend their hours, implement projects that further build their campus food security and better support the unique needs of their community.

Every college campus is different, and no student is the same. College students often have frustrating experiences applying for SNAP, because the program has difficulty acknowledging multifaceted student identities. A “college student” is not only referring to person aged, 18-24, but can include older adults, single parents, persons who are unhoused, first-generation college students, immigrants/members of mixed status households, and those who are disabled. Food security programs on college and university campuses become vital in those moments with programs often led by volunteers, students, and unpaid staff members. The Hunger Free Campus Grant Program allows for more sustainable solutions to a growing problem.

We commend Delegate Davis for her work on HB 0774 and her ongoing efforts to expand the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program, acknowledging the critical need for increased funding. However, we recommend revising the legislation to incorporate the amendments as noted above before offering our full support.