



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 789
Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program – Alterations

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 21, 2025

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment 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 the federal nutrition programs.

On behalf of Maryland Hunger Solutions, I offer our strong support of SB 789-Higher Education-Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program Alterations, which would increase the funding to the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program by \$100,000 and open the Hunger-Free Campus title designation to private institutions of higher education, with no change to their funding eligibility.

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.

The 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

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.>



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 anywhere from 9 to 11 Maryland campuses. This amount is roughly one-third of eligible Maryland public campuses, having been successfully awarded funds.

The first year that the grant program went live, requests totaled nearly \$450,000, but available program funding only allotted for a third of that amount. Over the last three cycles, the average campus award has hovered around a range of \$10,000-20,000. Most campuses apply for the grant with in-kind contributions, and 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. Each year, the total of campus requests for the grant has surpassed the amount of appropriated funding.

Additional funding for the Hunger- Free Campus Grant Program 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 policy has difficulty acknowledging multifaceted identity. 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 Senator Washington for her work on SB 789 and continued efforts to support the growth of the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program, recognizing the need for more funding

In conclusion, we urge a favorable report for SB 789. Thank you for your time.