



**CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM  
ADVOCACY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**

**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM: ADVOCACY  
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND  
BEFORE THE MARYLAND SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, ENERGY,  
AND THE ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTING  
SB-789, HIGHER EDUCATION-HUNGER-FREE CAMPUS GRANT PROGRAM-  
ALTERNATION**

**ON FEBRUARY 21, 2025**

**FAVORABLE**

Honorable Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

The Critical Issues Forum: Advocacy for Social Justice (CIF) supports Senate Bill 789, "Higher Education-Hunger Free Campus Grant Program-Alterations." CIF is composed of Temple Beth Ami, Kol Shalom, and Adat Shalom. It is a coalition of synagogues that includes over 1,750 families and three denominations of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist.

CIF strongly supports Senate Bill 789, which seeks to expand and improve the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program to address food insecurity among Maryland's college students. Food insecurity remains a significant issue on college campuses across the state. Studies have shown that many students struggle to afford adequate and nutritious meals, negatively impacting their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a June 2024 report finding that only 2 in 5 food-insecure college students were eligible for SNAP benefits. And of those eligible, 59% did not take advantage of the program. In other words, most students who likely meet the eligibility criteria for the SNAP program are not benefitting from the program. By comparison, 18% of all U.S. households eligible for SNAP do not receive it, reflecting an 82% participation rate. Eligible college students' utilization of SNAP benefits is nearly four times worse than that of the general population. These findings underscore the challenges of college students who lack awareness of accessing SNAP benefits.

In 2021, the General Assembly established the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program to address student hunger. The law originally authorized \$150,000 in grant funds for public 2-year and 4-year colleges that establish programs that, among other things, assist students in enrolling in SNAP and connecting students with SNAP outreach partners. According to the Maryland Higher

Education Commission, nine colleges requested \$285,447 in grant funds for FY 2025. The Grant Program is popular among Maryland universities and community colleges but is underfunded.

Senate Bill 789 would continue to strengthen the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program by:

- Increased funding and eligibility to ensure more institutions can participate.
- Expand partnerships with local food banks and community organizations, provide at least one food pantry on campus, and enable students in need to receive food through a separate, stigma-free arrangement.
- Improving outreach and awareness of available resources for students in need.

We strongly support the legislative effort to increase funding to \$250,000 to expand grant funding available under the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program. This limited incremental increase is a cost-effective way to improve the accessibility of SNAP for Maryland students who may already be eligible for benefits. These additional funding resources will ensure that Maryland's colleges and universities have the support necessary to reduce food insecurity and help students succeed. No student should have to choose between paying tuition and affording their next meal.

This bill would provide additional grant funds to colleges that engage in outreach and other efforts to increase SNAP participation and provide food-sharing and meal plan programs on campus.

We respectfully urge the committee to issue a **favorable report** on SB 789.