

SB 789

Higher Education – Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program – Alterations Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee February 21, 2025

SUPPORT

Senate Bill 789 increases the program funding for the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program by \$100,000, and allows private institutes of higher education eligible to receive the title designation of Hunger-Free Campus.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders are at risk of food insecurity. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, including communities of color. The causes of food insecurity are complex and often include additional factors such as low income, lack of reliable transportation, and missing community resources including grocery stores.

The Maryland Food Bank knows that higher education is a demonstrated pathway out of hunger. Yet for many Marylanders, higher education is out of reach due to barriers such as financial affordability, household and familial obligations, and logistical concerns including transportation and affordable housing. Through our College Pantry Program, we establish and support food pantries in partnership with colleges and universities, focusing on healthy food options as well as supports to lift students out of poverty, including workforce development opportunities, public benefit application assistance, and grant dollars for non-food resources such as toiletries and “remain in school” emergency funds. In FY 24, we operated pantries at 16 higher education sites and distributed the equivalent of over 150,000 meals to food-insecure students across the state.

Students are often an overlooked population for food insecurity efforts, yet the impact of assisting this group far outweighs any upfront cost in terms of the benefit of higher education to the student, their family, and their community. By bringing awareness to college campuses about available food assistance and connection to services such as SNAP enrollment, the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program is a valuable and effective response to the needs of this population.

The Maryland Food Bank appreciates your consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 789.