



February 19, 2025

2025 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY  
SB0789: Higher Education - Hunger-Free  
Campus Grant Program - Alterations

**BILL:** SB0789: Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program - Alterations  
**COMMITTEE:** Education, Energy, and the Environment  
**POSITION:** Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 789  
**BILL ANALYSIS:** Requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to designate certain private institutions of higher education as hunger-free campuses.

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. The Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) urges you to SUPPORT the Senate Bill 789. We are providing this testimony to express our strong support for Senate Bill 789, which proposes critical enhancements to the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program. This legislation aims to increase the annual budget from \$150,000 to \$250,000 beginning in fiscal year 2027 and expand eligibility to include private institutions for the "Hunger-Free Campus" designation, though not for funding<sup>1</sup>.



## **The Imperative to Address Food Insecurity on College Campuses**

Food insecurity among college students is a pressing public health concern that demands immediate attention. Studies have shown that food-insecure students are more than twice as likely to experience poor mental health outcomes, with nearly one in three considering suicide<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, these students face significant challenges in academic performance and overall well-being<sup>2</sup>.

## **Current Participation and the Need for Expansion**

The existing Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program has seen significant interest and participation from public institutions across Maryland<sup>1</sup>. However, as of now, no college campuses in Montgomery County have had the opportunity to participate<sup>3</sup>. Montgomery College, for instance, has demonstrated immense interest in addressing student hunger. A 2021 survey revealed that 36% of Montgomery College students experienced food insecurity, 48% faced housing insecurity, and 13% were homeless<sup>3</sup>.

## **Impact of SBo789 on Montgomery County**

By increasing funding and expanding eligibility, SBo789 offers a positive opportunity to grow the program and focus on equity<sup>1</sup>. More funding allows for a greater chance for more campuses, including those in Montgomery County, to participate<sup>3</sup>. This expansion is crucial for supporting Montgomery County students, ensuring their graduation, and enabling their future contributions to the local economy<sup>4</sup>.

## **The Case for Increased Funding**

While the proposed increase to \$250,000 is a step in the right direction, it may not be sufficient to address the widespread issue of food insecurity among Maryland's college students<sup>1</sup>. Given the state's budget capacity, a more substantial investment would enable the program to reach more institutions and, consequently, more students in need<sup>1</sup>.



## Conclusion

Senate Bill 789 represents a critical advancement in the fight against student hunger in Maryland. By enhancing funding and expanding eligibility, this legislation will empower more institutions to implement sustainable solutions to food insecurity, directly benefiting students' health, academic success, and future prospects. We urge the General Assembly to pass SB0789 and consider further increasing the program's funding to more effectively combat food insecurity across all Maryland campuses<sup>1</sup>. Thank you for your attention to this vital issue.

Sincerely,

Nanya Chiejine, MPH  
Executive Director,  
Montgomery County Food Council

## References

<sup>1</sup> Maryland General Assembly. (2025). *Senate Bill 0789*. Retrieved February 4, 2025, from <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/bills/sb/sb0789F.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Student Support Network. (2024, July). *New data reveals disturbingly high rate of food insecurity for many Maryland students*. Retrieved February 4, 2025, from <https://studentsupportnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/New-Data-Reveals-Disturbingly-High-Rate-of-Food-Insecurity-for-Many-Maryland-Students-0224.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Montgomery College. (2022, February 17). *Supporting basic needs like food and shelter: Federal grant aims to break down barriers*. Retrieved February 4, 2025, from <https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/news/features/2022-2-17-supporting-basic-needs-like-food-and-shelter-federal-grant-aims-to-break-down-barriers.html>

<sup>4</sup> Montgomery County Government. (2023, April 27). *Community Needs Assessment Report 2023*. Retrieved February 4, 2025, from <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/CNA%20Report%202023.April%2027.pdf>



For more information, please contact Nanya Chiejine, Executive Director,  
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*The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources*



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