

March 9/11, 2021

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 767/HB 891**

**Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program - Established**

*Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs/Appropriations Committee*

Dear Chair and members of the Committee,

The undersigned Maryland organizations strongly support SB 767/HB 891, which is designed to create and support hunger-free campuses at higher education institutions across the state of Maryland.

This legislation aims to create a state-funded matching grant program that will provide higher education institutions with funding to address food insecurity in their campus community. These grant dollars would be administered by the Maryland Higher Education Commission and go towards efforts such as establishing a Hunger-Free Task Force; designating staff to connect eligible students with SNAP application assistance and local SNAP retailers; establishing a system for stigma-free access to community food resources; raising awareness for food insecurity through campus events in order to reduce stigma; and creating a meal plan swipe sharing program that allows students to donate unused swipes to fellow students in need.

While the pursuit of higher education is often associated with the path towards greater career achievements, this path is often fraught with financial challenges that cause students to struggle with food insecurity along the way. As higher education students grapple with the rising cost of tuition and other expenses associated with their education, they often find themselves with limited resources left for food. On top of which, many students face additional life challenges that put them at even greater risk. For example, research analysis conducted by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) has found that students of color, older students, former foster youth, parenting students, students who experienced childhood food insecurity, first generation college students, among many others are even more likely than most to experience food insecurity at some point during their studies.

While the issue of hunger in higher education is not new, students still face a number of unique barriers that prevent them from accessing the resources that so many low-income Marylanders rely. For example, off-campus pantries can be challenging to reach, and stigma plays a huge role in preventing many students from seeking help outside of their college community. Additionally, students face extra eligibility requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Although students eligible for work study also qualify for SNAP, few may be aware of their eligibility without guidance from SNAP application specialists.

The Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program seeks to bring much needed and long-awaited relief to struggling students across Maryland by funding efforts that specifically target barriers that prevent them from accessing the nutritional support the need to succeed in their studies. As Maryland continues to strive to lead the country in education, we must ensure that students are not forced to suffer hunger or its negative outcomes because of their pursuit of higher education. For this reason, the undersigned

organizations urge the committee to make a critical investment in Maryland's education system and future by providing a favorable report on SB 767/HB 891.

Thank you for your consideration,

Maryland Hunger Solutions