



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Delegate Maggie McIntosh, Chair
Appropriations Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21041

Re: Testimony **IN SUPPORT** of HB 891: Higher Education – Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program

Dear Chair McIntosh and Members of the Committee,

I am pleased to announce my strong support for House Bill 891, which would help address student hunger at our institutions of higher education by establishing a hunger-free grant program. Throughout the pandemic, we've been reminded how vitally important it is for state and local governments to ensure adequate access to food.

In Howard County, we established a COVID Response Food program for residents who, for multiple reasons, found themselves unable to access existing food resources in the county. These barriers to access include transportation, loss of income due to COVID, and health limitations, among others. Thus far, we have served nearly 4,000 families, provided over 7,000 meal kits, and over 2,000 grocery boxes. Our data also show that a staggering 100 percent of families who received assistance through this program returned for more. This shows how essential of a service food access is.

As a former educator in Baltimore institutions of higher education, who often worked with students facing economic challenges, I often witnessed students struggling to manage tuition, books and basic necessities. These students were so dedicated to obtaining their education, they often went without meals. In my time as Director of Complete College Baltimore, I was tasked with advocating and coordinating efforts to promote student success, increase retention and graduation rates. We designed education programs and trainings for students who may be "at risk" and in need of early intervention or other support resources.

As higher education's student body grows more diverse with access expanding for parents with children or students from lower income communities, I fully support the government taking a proactive approach to adapt to the population's needs so that everyone, regardless of ability or zip code, has an equitable chance to succeed and live their best lives.

House Bill 891 would provide both a sound framework and seed funding to allow 4-year institutions and community colleges to implement individualized programs at the school level. In Howard County, we embrace innovation and aspire to be a model healthy, sustainable community for all. I am certain that should this bill become law, my Administration will be eager to work with Howard Community College to effectively connect students in need to healthy food.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on House Bill 891.

Sincerely,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive