

MaryPIRG strongly encourages members of the Maryland General Assembly to vote YES on HB891, which will establish the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program to address hunger and food insecurity on college campuses. The establishment of Hungry Free Campuses is a crucial step in alleviating food insecurity and addressing basic food needs that college students experience.

MaryPIRG is a non-partisan student organized and funded group at the University of Maryland which uses grassroots organizing tactics to tackle issues pertinent to students. One of which being student hunger and food insecurity. Our campaign, Zero Hunger, works closely with this issue and has seen the ways in which food insecurity devastates those affected.

As students, we understand the unique stressors that food insecurity incites in students suffering from this very relevant and important issue. Many students dealing with these stressors experience anxiety, self-esteem issues, depression, lower GPAs, and higher chances of withdrawing, among many others. For many, the price of college is unobtainable, causing them to cut corners elsewhere to afford it, typically by skipping meals. Or, simply put, many students cannot afford to eat. This is a pernicious issue, as going to college and receiving higher education should not be a competition between paying tuition and buying groceries; buying textbooks and eating healthy; or getting a degree and eating three meals a day.

Despite certain resources that may be already available, it is evident that students continue to suffer from hunger related issues. As stated in the UMD Food Access and Student Well-Being Study, 2% undergraduate and graduate students are food insecure. Now, that study was conducted in 2017. Imagine the amount of students affected today, with the pandemic inducing economic instability— it's likely this number has drastically increased.

One student we are familiar with is a college student at UMD living off campus without a meal plan. He is a hardworking, studious computer science student trying to make ends meet. Without a meal plan and rent to pay, he rarely has the funds to buy food. It got so severe that he had to reach out to friends and ask for food, because there was nothing he had available. Resorting to fast food was sometimes the only option he had, taking up unhealthy eating habits that negatively affected his mental and physical well-being. A bill which makes food accessible and readily available would be a significant help to students like this who need the resource.

While society may soon return to normal, the economic hardships incited may not be soon to go. This is why it's crucial the MGA begin to take action against student hunger and food insecurity. Through the HB891 bill, Hunger-Free college campuses will be allocated resources to better serve their community, leading to a more food secure environment. At MaryPIRG, we

understand food insecurity to be a multifaceted issue, with many approaches needed to be taken to amend it, but we believe the HB891 bill is a step in the right direction for addressing student concerns. This is why we urge MGA members to vote yes on HB891.

Sincerely,

Ayanna Chambers

*Zero Hunger Coordinator and MaryPIRG Visibility Chair and Secretary*

Buckley Sake

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Greeshma Anand

*Board Chair of MaryPIRG Students*