



March 11, 2021

2021 SESSION POSITION PAPER

BILL: HB891: Higher Education - Hunger Free Campus Grant Program - Established
COMMITTEE: House Appropriations Committee
POSITION: Testimony of Support of House Bill 0891
BILL ANALYSIS: Establishing the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program to address student hunger and basic food needs on campus; requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to administer the Program, develop a certain form, and designate certain campuses as hunger-free campuses; authorizing certain public institutions of higher education to develop certain procedures and make certain information publicly available; requiring the Governor, beginning in fiscal year 2023, to include in the annual budget bill a \$150,000 appropriation for the Program; etc.

Dear Chair McIntosh and Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

The Montgomery County Food Council urges you to **SUPPORT** this bill as it seeks to improve food access for Maryland college students experiencing food insecurity.

The economic downturn that has continued to worsen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges that college students face in managing school-related costs and has caused an increase in food insecurity on college campuses. Many low-income students are forced to borrow more money, work more hours, take fewer courses, or drop out altogether due to the downturn. When seeking employment opportunities, students are limited by their school schedules and a challenging job market due to COVID-19. After deducting necessary costs such as rent, tuition, electricity, medication and childcare, college students are often left without adequate funds to spend on food. This was a problem before COVID-19, which has only been exacerbated over the past year.

Without proper nutrition, students face the risk of poor concentration, depression, and other negative effects on their ability to study and complete their courses. During the fall of 2020, the "Grover to Go" program at the Universities at Shady Grove, which offers students free pantry items, experienced a 33% increase in the number of students served as compared to the fall of 2019. Pre-pandemic, as recently as 2019, at least 20% of students at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD-CP) were experiencing food insecurity¹, which is a 15% increase from 2015. UMD-CP found that students experiencing food insecurity typically had lower GPAs, and were more likely to withdraw from the school before finishing their degree, compared to food secure students. School meal programs in K-12 institutions are a proven strategy to significantly reduce food insecurity and improve educational outcomes, and the Hunger Free Campus Grant Program would promote a healthier, more capable student population in higher-education institutions throughout Maryland.

For these reasons, the Montgomery County Food Council supports HB0891 and urges you to vote **FOR** this bill.

The Montgomery County Food Council is an independent council formed and led by individual community members and representatives of local businesses, government, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions. Our mission is to

¹ 2019 Survey conducted by Dr. Yu-Wei Wang at the University of Maryland, College Park



bring together a diverse representation of stakeholders to improve the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of Montgomery County, Maryland through the creation of a robust, local, sustainable food system. Our vision is to cultivate a vibrant food system in Montgomery County that consciously produces, distributes, and recycles food, making it accessible to all residents while promoting the health of the local food economy, its consumers, and the environment.

For more information, please contact: Heather Bruskin, MCFC Executive Director at the email and phone number below.

