

Delegate Maggie McIntosh

Appropriations Committee

HB0891

Thursday, March 11th, 2021 - 1:30 p.m.

The University System of Maryland Student Council (USMSC) is writing in favor of the HB0891 Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program to eradicate student hunger on college campuses. USMSC represents over 170,000 students across 13 college campuses across the state of Maryland. USMSC is in favor of HB0891 because it provides immediate relief to students facing financial hardship. This financial hardship is linked to limited access to meals for students and thus hinders access to equitable and high-quality education. More students are subject to this financial hardship because of the COVID-19 economic crisis that has caused shrinkage in the job market and high unemployment rates amongst college students. Additionally, if passed, HB0891, would address student hunger with a sustainable solution, providing the continuous distribution of \$150,000 yearly across USM campuses through a commission. Beyond ensuring that students do not go hungry, the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program will also foster partnerships at local, state, and national levels to address food insecurity.

Various institutions across Maryland report food insecurity and the need for additional resources to support students. According to a 2018 study conducted by the University of Maryland, College Park, more than 20% of students are food insecure. Students at the university have also indicated a lack of awareness of the resources available, one of which includes the campus food pantry that predominantly runs on donations. In addition, based on a 2017 conducted survey, the University of Maryland, Baltimore County noted over 48% of 4,000 students as food insecure, and over 56% of first-generation students reported food insecurity. In Fall 2020, Towson University announced how its food pantry's traffic has doubled since the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, 18% of Student Emergency Fund applicants reported food insecurity; these numbers have increased to 48% since. USMSC firmly believes that eradicating these rising figures are essential to combat student hunger. HB0891 would provide institutions necessary resources to address this issue and ensure that students can take advantage of their educational responsibilities to reach their full potential.

USMSC champions student representation in all aspects of governance. In order for public institutions to achieve Hunger-Free status, it is crucial that a Hunger-Free Task Force is established. This task force would meet at least three times a year and be designated a full-time staff member to adequately address the concerns highlighted in HB0891. The responsibilities of this staff member include but are not limited to connecting students with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and informing students in the federal work-study program that they can apply for this program. Additionally, this task force will be responsible for planning a national hunger and homelessness awareness week. Also, it would institute a meal-sharing program for students to donate unused meals contributing to the elimination of hunger and the reduction of food waste on Maryland college campuses.

The University of Maryland Student Council reaffirms its position in favor of HB0891, Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program. This bill will positively impact thousands of students in the University System of Maryland by eradicating hunger on campuses using a sustainable methodology while including student voices.