

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Josephine Cureton and I am a New Haven resident and an undergraduate student at Yale University. I write today in support of HB-6229: **AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.**

Currently, safety net programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) fail as the majority of full-time university students are unable to fulfill the 20-hour a week work requirement. This means that students would have to sacrifice valuable unpaid opportunities, study, and sleep time to be able to qualify for benefits. Additionally, while tuition assistance is provided at the federal, state, collegiate, and private levels, this funding often is not allowed to apply to school meal plans and other food expenses. At the University of Connecticut, the in-residence meal plan is at least \$2855 per semester, a significant expense many students cannot afford. Although there are no nationally representative estimates of food insecurity among students, recent literature reviews showed that about 1 in 3 college students experienced food insecurity before the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis.

Food insecurity amongst college students is an issue of epidemic proportions, likely underestimated in the absence of robust data. HB 6229 seeks to close that gap in Connecticut, legislating from a posture of learning and commissioning a study among the state's public institutions of higher learning. What extant evidence tells us is deeply troubling: food-insecure students report lower grade point averages, are six times more likely to withdraw from a class, and are fifteen times more likely to fail a class. They have also reported poorer physical health and higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Food insecurity disproportionately affects low-income full-time college students, many forced to choose between rent or textbooks and their next meal. Passing this bill would prove a *critical* step in improving educational outcomes for low-income students at Connecticut's colleges.

The current pandemic has only served to exacerbate the gravity of this issue. Due to increasing unemployment levels and the closure of campus resources, existing support measures, such as food pantries, remain ineffective in aiding food-insecure students. Formalizing the collection of data on food insecurity will help identify emergent areas of need and improve delivery of services at public institutions of higher education.

In conclusion, I would like to restate my strong support for HB 6229. No college student should suffer from a lack of access to nutritious food. The establishment of this task force is the least our state can do, and I ask the committee to vote favorably on this important and necessary measure.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

With gratitude,

Josephine Cureton
New Haven