



Testimony in Support of HB 6229

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

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

Food insecurity has been an issue that's plagued our society for as long as it's existed. Food insecurity is especially prevalent at public institutions of higher education because of the lack of budget and funding they have available to them. Personally, my cousins who went to community college three years before I went to university struggled with food shortages because of the large population of students that attended the college. They depended on the college as a food supply but weren't always satisfied with their portions. This frightened me because I didn't want to be experiencing hunger at an institution of higher education, where I am supposed to be nourished not only mentally but physically. However, I had the privilege of attending a private university, and I know many people don't have that same opportunity. Safety net programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) fail because the majority of full-time university students are unable to fulfill the 20-hour a week work requirement and thus do not qualify for benefits. Therefore, this bill ensures that students do not suffer through a lack of access to nutritious food.

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 15 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 the 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,

William Garcia