

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Theo Haaks 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.**

I, and many of my close friends, are full time college students who come from low income backgrounds. Because we are all heavily involved in classes and extracurricular activities and the availability of our schedules does not always line up with designated meal times, it is not uncommon for us to purchase food or meals from outside of the university food service system. For most students this may hardly be an issue, but for low income students who are already struggling financially, such extra expenses produce undue stress and strain. Some of that struggle could be mitigated through safety net programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). However, since we, like the majority of full-time university students, are unable to fulfill the 20-hour a week work requirement, we do not qualify for those benefits.

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 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,

Theo Haaks