

H.B. No. 6229 AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

To the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

Thank you for considering H.B. No. 6229, *An Act Addressing the Needs of Food-Insecure Students at Public Institutions of Higher Education*. My name is Rebecca Tripp, and I am the coordinator of UConnPIRG's Hunger & Homelessness Campaign at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. I want to speak to my team's experience with our constituents that would directly benefit from the approval of this legislation.

As a student-driven advocacy group with a campaign committed to ending hunger and homelessness, UConnPIRG recognizes the impacts of food insecurity on our peers at UConn, all its branch campuses, and at Connecticut community colleges. The proposed bill's goal, "to require public institutions of higher education to assess and address food insecurity among students" through a comprehensive survey that includes demographic background information and requires subsequent administrative action, supports current student efforts to better understand and address the scope of hunger on campus. These efforts are particularly urgent due to increased food insecurity as a result of COVID-19.

For instance, UConnPIRG works closely with the Undergraduate Student Government at Storrs on a financial assistance program called Husky Market, a \$120,000 program that provides students facing food insecurity with supplemental gift cards to purchase groceries. The implementation of such a proposed survey would guide the development and expansion of the program and provide us with data to advocate on behalf of our constituents. We also work on efforts to enhance students' connection to assistance programs, and as such are pushing to include food insecurity resources in university course syllabi. Having this data and administrative involvement would bolster our ability to win on such proposals and to make our resources more accessible for students.

We have been tracking the progress of this issue through the CGA since the spring 2020 legislative session with the introduction of H.B. No. 5013, *An Act Concerning Access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program by Eligible College Students*. As reflected in a statement of support for H.B. No. 5013 from the Connecticut Department of Social Services, students currently enrolled in Connecticut colleges or universities are often not eligible for benefits because they do not satisfy a federal exemption. This bill to identify programs that lead to direct employment enables the current qualifications to better identify and supplement students in need.

As a member of UConnPIRG, I am constantly inspired by our generation and its collective drive to invent and enact vehicles of positive change. One of the most effective mechanisms of acquiring the knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to build a better tomorrow is through higher education today. For many individuals, the prospect of financing a degree is already a challenge, and compounded with food insecurity, can become an impossibility. We believe that expanding SNAP eligibility is integral in increasing educational accessibility for students that may otherwise have to choose between a college degree and food on the table. Students currently struggling with food insecurity should have access to nutritional meals that meet their basic needs as well as enhance their success in academic settings, and therefore, the workforce.

H.B. No. 6229 addresses this concern of interest because it advocates for the right to student food security and increases the accessibility of public education. As constituents, we thank the General Assembly for using state legislation to assist our extensive, unique, and socially conscious goals through your sensitivity to the needs of all students.

In gratitude,

Rebecca Tripp
UConnPIRG Hunger & Homelessness Campaign Coordinator