



Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, March 2, 2021

Testimony submitted by Alison Weir, Policy Advocate/Staff Attorney, Greater Hartford Legal Aid

H.B. 6229, An Act Concerning Access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program by Eligible College Students, Support, with changes

My name is Alison Weir, and I am an attorney and policy advocate with Greater Hartford Legal Aid (GHLA). On behalf of GHLA, Connecticut Legal Services, and New Haven Legal Assistance Association I am writing in support of HB 6229, but urge the committee to adopt the version of the bill that it JF'd out of committee last year when this issue was taken up, before the public health emergency.

SNAP rules are quite restrictive about college student eligibility. They were premised on the assumption that middle class students were taking advantage of the program while attending college, despite access to family resources. That assumption, if ever valid, is no longer. Fewer than 30% of college students fit the traditional model of going straight to college from high school as a dependent of their parents. *FOOD INSECURITY: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits Report to Congressional Requesters*, December 2018, GAO-19-95, United States Government Accountability Office, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/696254.pdf> There is an epidemic of hunger on college campuses presently. Fortunately, the Food Stamp Act allows states to exempt students from these restrictions, if they are enrolled in programs that expand their employability, in accordance with certain federal criteria. A number of other states including Washington, Massachusetts, California and Illinois have expanded SNAP eligibility for students in this way. This not only benefits the students, it brings more SNAP dollars into the state economy.

This bill, as drafted, links qualifying state community college programs to the SNAP Educational and Training programs set forth in Connecticut General Statute section 17b-105f, and specifies that DSS should seek federal approval. The SNAP E & T program is a very specific federally authorized and partially federally funded program. Many more students could qualify, and they could qualify for longer periods, if the language more broadly referenced programs *with components equivalent to* SNAP education and training programs. Under the Food Stamp Act, states can determine which programs qualify, by reference to the specified federal criteria. No federal approval is necessary. Students qualifying under such a program are eligible from enrollment in the program through classes, and vacation periods until graduation. This is a critical distinction from SNAP eligibility for those enrolled in SNAP E & T programs, for whom eligibility ends when the specific program ends. I would like to note that four year college programs that prepare students for immediate employment could also qualify as programs that expand employability under federal SNAP law, and I urge the legislature to expand the program to include four year college programs as well as community college programs.

I am attaching alternative language that was JF'd from the committee when this proposal was considered last year that could accomplish this broader goal, which I believe was intended. Thank you.