



## Testimony in Support of HB 6229

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Sydney Zoehrer 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.**

Meal plans are expensive enough for those able to pay full price for tuition, room and board, and other fees — for those struggling to pay what has been deemed an appropriate family and student contribution by the university, mustering funds for a hefty meal plan is even more challenging. Often, safety net programs that aim to aid food-insecure students fail due to the work requirement of twenty hours weekly, as is the stipulation to receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The existing infrastructure is insufficient and its inadequacies hinder students from achieving academic and extracurricular success while enrolled in public institutions of higher learning. Affording food while attending a university centered around academic excellence should not be a concern of students who are under pressure in many other facets of their lives. When I returned back from winter break early one year, I had a hard time finding affordable food options and the dining halls were closed; the residential college kitchen where I lived had limited access and food supply which made it very difficult to find affordable food options for several days. HB 6229 prioritizes finding solutions for students so no one has to experience food insecurity as an added stress to other disadvantages they already face. By implementing new programs and services that would take into account individual experiences with food insecurity, HB 6229 would set all students up for success with affordable, nutritious options during the school year.

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,

Sydney Zoehrer