

# Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6229

AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT

**Title:** PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

**Vote Date:** 3/11/2021

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/2/2021

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

REP. FOSTER, 57th Dist.

REP. ELLIOTT, 88th Dist.

SEN. HASKELL, 26th Dist.

### REASONS FOR BILL:

To identify and assist food-insecure students and institutions of higher learning in the state.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

- Lines 51-55: requires UConn BOT, in addition to BOR, to consult with DSS to identify educational programs that would qualify as an E&T program that would increase a student's employability
- Lines 60-63: requires BOT to identify educational programs that would meet SNAP E&T requirements and to maximize the number of programs offered at their institution
- Lines 64-66: allows any independent higher education institution in the state to consult with DSS for the purposes of administering a survey to collect data on food-insecure students
- Lines 67-73: requires BOT to update its online list of qualified SNAP E&T programs offered at UConn
- Makes other technical and conforming changes

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

### **CT Department of Social Services:**

Submitted written testimony in opposition to sections 2 and 3. Regarding section 2, DSS believes their existing partnerships with CSCU schools, and advertising of offered programs, are sufficient, and additional requirements under state statute are unnecessary. Regarding section 3, DSS believes the current language reflects *temporary* federal language implemented for the Covid-19 pandemic, and that changing language to reflect standard policy will lead to less confusion and align with federal law.

### **Jeffrey Shoulson, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, UCONN:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Provost Shoulson says the university surveyed and confirmed disparities in food access among students, especially between campuses. UCONN believes the biannual survey will provide richer data with which they can deliver superior solutions.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Yale Dems (1) (2) (3) (4):**

Submitted written testimony in support. Yale Dems believes that a 20-hour work week on top of their school responsibility is "almost impossible," and that estimates of student food insecurity are likely low due to a lack of robust data. They explain that food insecurity dramatically impacts educational performance, and state, "No college student should suffer from a lack of access to nutritious food."

### **Kristen Cooksey Stowers, Ph. D.:**

Submitted written testimony in support. Dr. Stowers understands the need to address food insecurity on campus both as a research and from personal experience as a student, and requests that reporting begin earlier than 2023. Dr. Stowers conducted a survey in response to SA 19-25 and found significant disparities between the main and regional campuses. Among others, one lesson learned from this study was "future college food insecurity surveys should ask about other social determinants of health like housing status." Two anecdotes from students describe their experiences with food insecurity, confusion over losing meal benefits in college that they received throughout K-12, and asking whether UCONN-Hartford can spare fruit or snacks so that students in the UCONN-Stamford dorms can afford something healthy.

### **Theo Haaks, Student, Yale:**

Submitted written testimony in support. States that he and many of his friends are low income students. Theo says the class and activity schedules don't always align with designated meal times and that purchasing meals outside of the university food system is an extra expense that produces undue stress and strain, that is not always affordable. As full-time students, they are unable to fulfill the 20-hour work week requirement for SNAP benefits. Theo reports that food insecurity on college campuses is underestimated, significantly impacts academic performance, and has been made worse by the pandemic.

### **Jason Jakubowski, President & CEO, Connecticut Food Bank/Foodshare:**

Submitted written testimony in support. President Jakubowski explains that one in eight CT residents is food insecure under normal circumstances. The pandemic has increased this to

one in seven and is expected to continue increasing as high as 28%. Many students attend school to break the cycle of poverty, but while attending still struggle to afford basic needs, leading to poorer health and academic performance. They stand ready to partner with this committee to address food insecurity in the communities they serve.

**Robin Lamott Sparks, Executive Director, End Hunger Connecticut:**

Submitted written testimony in support with alternative language. EHC applauds CT's support for students in years K-12, noting CT is top 10 for summer meals; however, they find "the same commitment has been lacking" for students in college. EHC wants the bill language changed to expand the number of employment and training programs which exempt students from the 20-hour work requirement. They explain that the number of students attending college from low income backgrounds has greatly increased in recent years, and that neighboring Massachusetts found ~50% of community college students and ~33% of public university students were food insecure. They explain the 20-hour work requirement is difficult to meet, but federal law allows the state to expand exemptions for participants involved in an employment or training program. This provision could be used to expand eligibility to students in both 2- and 4-year programs.

**Marlene B. Schwartz, Ph. D., Director, Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, UCONN:**

Submitted written testimony in support with alternative language. Prof. Schwartz welcomes this bill as a continuation of SA 19-25. The results of the following survey showed that "more than one-third of all respondents reported low or very low food security, ... [that] students on the regional campuses reported substantially higher rates of food insecurity than students in Storrs, ... [and] detected significant ethnic and racial disparities, with Black and Latinx students reporting overall higher rates of food insecurity than white and Asian students." The Rudd Center has prepared a new survey designed to increase response rates and provide more accurate data. They recommend "all Connecticut institutions of higher education should include the same set of validated questions based on the USDA's 18- item Food Insecurity Module."

**Rebecca Tripp, Coordinator, UConnPIRG's Hunger & Homelessness Campaign:**

Submitted written testimony in support. UConn PIRG works with student government to provide financial assistance to students facing food insecurity. The implementation of the proposed survey would directly guide this assistance. While they support SNAP for students, many do not qualify for federal work exemptions. They 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."

**Alison Weir, Greater Hartford Legal Aid (GHLA):**

Submitted written testimony in support with alternative language. GHLA prefers the bill from the 2020 session ([H.B. 5013](#)). They assert that SNAP Rules presume students are middle-class and have access to family resources, however, "fewer than 30% of college students fit the traditional model of going straight to college from high school as a dependent of their parents." They say the Food Stamp Act allows states to exempt students from restrictions if they are enrolled in programs that increase their employability, and that other states have already done this, benefitting not just students, but states as well by adding these SNAP dollars to the state economy. By changing language to include "programs with *components equivalent to* SNAP education and training," the state can expand eligibility without needing federal approval.

**Additional Testimony from Yale Students:**

Submitted written testimony in support. They explain that the majority of students are unable to fulfill the 20-hour work week requirement for SNAP, that tuition assistance is not able to be applied to food expenses, and even when a food plan is available like at UCONN's Storrs campus, the \$2855 per semester cost is not always affordable. They explain that food insecurity dramatically impacts educational performance, that the current pandemic conditions have further reduced food access, and state, "No college student should suffer from a lack of access to nutritious food."

[Josephine Cureton](#)

[McKenzie Denham](#)

[Patrick Feeley](#)

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None Expressed

**Reported by: Jeremy Salyer**

**Date: 03/16/2021**