



STUDENT HUNGER IS REAL. WE CAN HELP END IT.

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Dear Members of the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Higher Education,

My name is Robb Friedlander and I serve as the Advocacy and Organizing Manager at Swipe Out Hunger. Swipe Out Hunger is a national nonprofit whose mission it is to partner with colleges to end student hunger. Since 2010, our organization has served nearly two million warm, nourishing dining hall meals to college students facing food insecurity. You can learn more on our work at SwipeHunger.org. Previous to this position, I served as Advocacy Manager at Feeding America for four years.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony before you today. I have two hopes today. The first is that I'm able to elevate the issue of student hunger, that an estimated 45% of our SUNY students have reported experiencing food insecurity in the last 30 days. Secondly, we want to encourage the committees to consider Governor Cuomo's proposal to expand SNAP access to more college students.

SUNY and CUNY are already leading the way.

Every SUNY has either a food pantry on site (70%) or one directly close to campus (30%). Task forces have sprung up on dozens of campuses which are introducing new programs. At the CUNYs, the Healthy CUNY initiative has hired student advocates to raise awareness, introduce new programs and galvanize more support for students' basic needs.

Both systems have sparked central partnerships to support them in this work. We want to highlight the work of the OTDA who has been dispatching social services staff to SUNY campuses to share information about resources like SNAP to students. And of course the role Single Stop plays at numerous campuses, connecting students to public assistance.

Yet, rates of hunger persist. More action is needed, including at the state level.

Why Student Hunger.

According to the US Government Accountability Office, 39% of undergraduates in the US, one in three college students, is food insecure. At the SUNY level, about 45% of students face food insecurity and we recently learned through a study by the Hope Center that a staggering 51% of CUNY students are food insecure. While resources like food pantries and SNAP exist, there are draconian work requirements many students don't know these resources are available or stigma holds them back. Instead, they skip meals, relying on cheap and/or processed foods with low nutritional value.

A student's ability to focus in class, stay in school, and feel part of the campus community are threatened by food insecurity.

Swipe Out Hunger is a national nonprofit partnering with universities and colleges to end student hunger. Since their start in 2010, Swipe Out Hunger has become the foremost

organization responding to the issue through its innovative programming and success in policy as seen in the Hunger-Free Campus Bill movement.

The organization works with colleges and universities to provide financially and logistically efficient anti-hunger programs, including the “Swipe Drive,” allowing students to donate their extra meal plan swipes to their peers who face food insecurity on campus. Recognized for its entrepreneurial nature, Swipe Out Hunger has been named an Obama White House Champion For Change and its founder, Rachel Sumekh, has landed a spot on the Forbes’ 30 Under 30 list. From its beginnings as a grassroots movement at UCLA in 2010, Swipe Out Hunger has since served 1.8 million nourishing meals across 38 states and more than 110 campuses.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO ADDRESS STUDENT HUNGER IN NEW YORK?

Recommendation 1: **SNAP** is vital to addressing hunger on college campuses. Our nation’s largest anti-hunger nonprofit Feeding America only serves one meal for every 12 meals provided by SNAP.

In Governor Cuomo’s State of the State, he put out a call to expand access to SNAP for eligible community college students. An excerpt from his proposal is below.

From Governor Cuomo’s State of the State Plan

Proposal. Expand College Student Enrollment in SNAP Benefits

Governor Cuomo has acted to reduce food insecurity among college students, so they are better able to focus on their studies and attain their college degree. The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) will establish policy to make more community college students eligible for essential SNAP benefits. Absent clarification that is lacking from the federal government, OTDA will establish state policy that community college students engaged at least half-time in career and technical education courses of study are exempt from the requirement to work 20 hours weekly to qualify for SNAP. These students will then be able to apply for and receive SNAP if they otherwise qualify based on available income and other basic eligibility rules that apply to all SNAP households.

This policy change will increase the participation of low-income college students in SNAP, providing them with essential nutritional benefits so they are more likely to obtain their college certification or degree. This degree attainment is expected to lead to a lifetime of higher earnings and resulting well-being.

The SNAP program continues to face threats of cuts at the federal level. This proposal would not require any change at the federal level, but would simply help alleviate the burden of excessive work requirements and document gathering. We recommend this proposal be adopted by OTDA and applied to not just community college students but to students at four year institutions as well.

Recommendation 2: New York can consider introducing its own **Hunger Free Campus Bill**.

Originally introduced in 2017 in California, the Hunger Free Campus legislation which was drafted by Swipe Out Hunger, encourages campuses to adopt known best practices. These best practices include

1. Establish a pantry on campus or host pop-up pantries on campus
2. Have staff or OTDA professionals on campus who can enroll students in SNAP
3. If your campus has a meal plan, allow students to donate their excess to swipes to peers
4. Increase SNAP acceptance on campus

Through Hunger Free Campus, colleges and universities that meet the specified requirements are eligible to receive funding from the state to bolster their anti-hunger efforts. In 2017, California's governor established a \$7.5 million dollar fund. In the two years since, the legislation has been renewed and the funding size increased to now more than a cumulative of \$20 million.

Other states are considering hunger free campus as well. New Jersey successfully introduced and passed their own Hunger Free Campus act alongside \$1 million for campuses. State legislators in Minnesota, Maryland and Philadelphia are all preparing to introduce similar legislation.

Funding for basic needs on campuses has an outsized impact. Supporting students basic needs safe guards our countries multi-billion dollar investment into financial aid.

A student cannot thrive without access to regular healthy meals. The importance of meals goes beyond calories and plays a significant role in the students social, emotions and mental health. Below are a few testimonials from students demonstrating the many ways access to meals positively impacts their experience on campus.

- "I get more sleep and pay more attention in class because I'm not hungry. I can exercise in the morning because I won't feel nauseous from skipping dinner the night prior." – Sophomore at a major four-year state institution
- "I have become more resilient to stressful situations now that I am eating regularly." – Fourth year
- "This program made me feel like the college really cares about me, beyond academics." – Third year

We appreciate the committee's interest and investment in the success of our states college and university students. If there are any questions on our recommendations or if your office opportunities to work alongside your offices to advance this cause, please contact me at robb@swipehunger.org.

Thank you for your continued commitment to our students and a higher education system that supports all students.

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