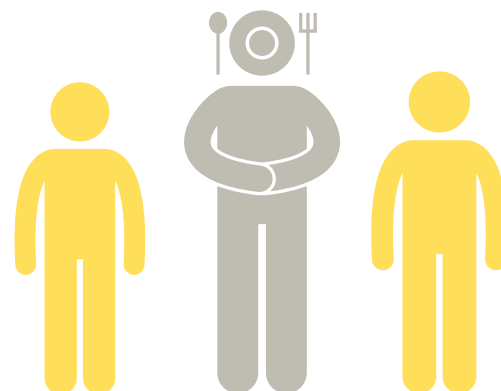


# ELIMINATING COLLEGE HUNGER: A POLICY BRIEF IN SUPPORT OF INCREASING SNAP ELIGIBILITY & USE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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## POLICY BRIEF SUMMARY

- College students are up to 4 times more likely than the rest of the nation to experience food insecurity<sup>1,2</sup>
- Recent changes in eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have made it much more difficult for students to obtain the financial aid needed to purchase adequate food<sup>3</sup>
- Increasing access to SNAP benefits by reducing work requirements for college students specifically could solve this crisis. We support the consideration of three different bills:
  - The College Student Hunger Act of 2019
  - Enhance Access to SNAP Act (EATS Act)
  - Opportunity to Address College Hunger Act



## COLLEGE FOOD INSECURITY RATES

While it is estimated that approximately 10.5% of the nation's population is food insecure,<sup>1</sup> this problem is much more rampant within college communities. Recent studies estimate that about **1 in 3 college students** have faced food insecurity.<sup>2</sup>

## KEY TERMS

Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain access to adequate food<sup>4</sup>

SNAP stands for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, a federal program that provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency<sup>5</sup>

College Student is defined as a student enrolled in an institution of higher education<sup>6</sup>

## WHY WORRY ABOUT HUNGRY COLLEGE STUDENTS?

### HEALTH IMPACT

Food insecurity is associated with both short and long-term health problems, including stress, anxiety, poorer nutritional status, weight gain, diabetes, hypertension, and poorer sleep.<sup>7,8</sup> Food insecurity has also shown to be associated with higher rates of depression and chronic disease, including hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and diabetes.<sup>9,10</sup>



### ACADEMIC IMPACT

Food insecurity may also compromise the ability to earn a college degree.<sup>11</sup> Recent research has shown that college students who experience food insecurity face more academic challenges and lower grades.<sup>9</sup> In fact, students who experience food insecurity are 22% less likely to earn a 3.5 GPA or above compared to their food-secure classmates.<sup>12</sup> In some cases, students may be forced to discontinue their education entirely due to food insecurity.<sup>13</sup> By not addressing this problem, we are leaving our college students hungry and ill-equipped to handle not only college, but the jobs beyond their college education.



## UNPRECEDENTED TIMES... HUNGER IN 2020

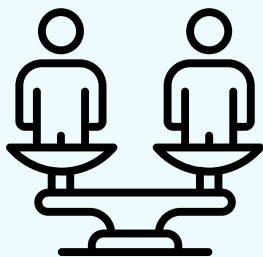
### IMPACT OF COVID-19

Financial hardships have only been exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by declining retention and lower fall enrollments at colleges and universities across the nation.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the economic impact of COVID-19 has caused nearly 1 in 3 of college students to lose their jobs,<sup>15</sup> decreasing eligibility for SNAP as college students are required to work 20 hours or more per week. Furthermore, students face increased technology costs and limited state-run scholarships.<sup>14</sup> This, in tandem with a loss of income due to COVID, has left many student workers ineligible for nutrition assistance programs.



### RECOGNIZING RACIAL & SOCIOECONOMIC DISPARITIES

College demographics are changing, shifting away from young adults from white, upper-middle-class families.<sup>9</sup> Students of color and first-generation students, who are more likely to face economic hardship and food insecurity make up nearly half of the student population.<sup>9</sup> As the pandemic lays bare the inequalities in our system, we may also assume that these students will bear the brunt of this food insecurity crisis.



## CAMPUS SOLUTIONS JUST AREN'T CUTTING IT

Campuses are taking action, but these solutions are short-term fixes to a systemic issue:

- keeping dining halls open over breaks<sup>16</sup>
- subsidizing unlimited meal plans<sup>16</sup>
- programs that allow for "swipe sharing" among students<sup>16</sup>
- campus food pantries<sup>16</sup>

## STUDENT QUOTES



"I skip meals, usually lunch and breakfast. I do have maybe [an energy] bar. I mean there are days where I don't have to go out then I'll just not move so much so I don't get so hungry."<sup>17</sup>

"I'll start stressing about the food. So then I'm taking my attention away from school and important things like that. I get tired and it sucks to go all day and not eat and come back from a long day of class and just want food and not have any."<sup>17</sup>

"Basically I pay off all my bills first and then whatever is left I try to find some space for food. . . At the end of paying off my bills and buying anything for school, I have like \$25 and once it runs out it's just gone."<sup>17</sup>

## WHAT ABOUT CURRENT SNAP USE?

About 1 in 10 college students receive SNAP benefits.<sup>17,18</sup> About 1 in 10 college students eligible for SNAP do not.<sup>20,21</sup> Hungry students are restricted by SNAP ineligibility, poor awareness of eligibility, and application challenges.

Campus solutions make only a fraction of the impact that federal expansion of SNAP would. Compared to the entire Feeding America network, for every meal provided, SNAP provides nine.<sup>18</sup>

***"This program [SNAP] is the single most powerful anti-hunger tool that we have and one of the most important economic development tools"***

– Kate Maehr,  
Head of the Chicago Food Bank<sup>19</sup>

## SO HOW DO WE SNAP OUT OF IT?

Our solutions focus on modifying the work requirement for college student to apply for SNAP benefits and increasing eligibility awareness. Bills in support of these modifications include:

### COLLEGE STUDENT HUNGER ACT OF 2019 (H.R. 3809 & S. 2143)<sup>6, 22</sup>

Increases SNAP:

- **Eligibility** by lowering the 20 hours per-week work requirement to 10 hours. Students also qualify if they are independent, eligible for a federal Pell Grant, or have an expected family contribution equal to zero.
- **Awareness** by informing states and colleges about student hunger and SNAP eligibility, access, and benefits
- **Outreach** by notifying SNAP-eligible students and referring them to SNAP application websites
- **Solutions** by testing hunger-alleviating solutions such as using SNAP to purchase prepared food from dining halls or applying the cash value of their benefit to directly offset the cost of a student meal plan

### OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS COLLEGE HUNGER ACT (H.R. 4637)<sup>24</sup>

Increases SNAP:

- **Awareness** by requiring the Department of Education must provide guidance to states and colleges on how to identify and communicate with students who are potentially eligible for SNAP.
- **Outreach** by requiring colleges to provide notice of SNAP eligibility to students receiving work-study assistance

### ENHANCE ACCESS TO SNAP ACT OF 2019 (H.R. 4297)<sup>23</sup>

Increases SNAP:

- **Eligibility** by equating college attendance with work for SNAP eligibility purposes

## SHOW ME THE MONEY!

- SNAP is an investment in our students and economy
- SNAP benefits are quickly spent, resulting in a cascade of positive effects throughout the economy<sup>25</sup>
- Every dollar increase in SNAP benefits generates about \$1.70 in economic activity<sup>26</sup>

*“Food insecurity is a college-completion issue, and is causing students to drop out. By not solving the problem, we’re undermining our federal investment in financial aid.”*

- Sara Goldrick-Rab, Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University<sup>27</sup>

## SNAP MYTHBUSTING

## OPPONENTS SAY:

*We need a work requirement because most college students are coming straight from high school and have support from their parents!*

*Students will just buy soda and unhealthy food with SNAP money!*

*Even if they won't buy soda and junk food, SNAP is rife with fraud and abuse.*



## PROPONENTS SAY:

Over 70% of college students are nontraditional with the average college student age increasing over time.<sup>26</sup>

It has been shown that participating in SNAP not only reduces food insecurity, but also helps in securing an overall healthier diet and weight.<sup>28</sup>

With the introduction of EBT cards, SNAP fraud has plummeted. SNAP fraud has fallen from every 3.8 cents per dollar to one cent per dollar over the last 20 years.<sup>29</sup>



## THE TAKE HOME MESSAGE

The Take Home Message Food insecurity disproportionately affects college students and is associated with a myriad of problems including anxiety, depression, decreased academic performance, and poorer health overall.<sup>30</sup> Federal action has the potential to ensure college students can focus on learning, safe-guard their academic and physical health, and provide a much needed stimulus for the economy. By modifying the current SNAP eligibility guidelines to better include this vulnerable population, more college students can worry less about their next meal and focus more on their next exam.

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