

My name is Yaleza Fernandez, and I am a junior at Binghamton University majoring in Human Development.

This past fall semester, I interned at the on-campus food pantry, where I saw how vital this resource is for college students. According to the most recent report by the SUNY Food Insecurity Task Force, more than 36% of all SUNY students battle with food insecurity, and nearly half of SUNY students struggle with housing insecurity.

While many have a stereotype of SUNY Binghamton students - it brings to question the typical idea that college students don't experience hunger when many do, given that the pantry served 1,226 students over a single semester.

Students of all ages and backgrounds can struggle with basic needs and a lack of resources. When you are hungry, you are not only unable to focus in class but cannot strive to be your best self and fulfill your dream of earning your degree. I have seen all kinds of students coming to our pantry, from undergraduates to graduate students.

Many people fail to consider that most of the student population is in debt, and at times a meal plan that can last the entire semester may be too expensive. This is one of the reasons why students rely on the services such as the Food Pantry to ensure that they have regular access to food when they do not have enough money left on their meal plans. Thus, towards the end of the semester, the number of students we serve increases.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the issue of college student hunger and basic needs issues on campus even direr. Our incredible team and pantry at Binghamton are doing as much as possible, but there is so much more to be done. Just relying on donations does not guarantee enough food to adequately support students consistently. That is why I am here today to support the Hunger-Free Campus Bills, SB 1151 and A 6881.

The Hunger-Free Campus Bill was passed in California, New Jersey, Maryland, Minnesota, and Massachusetts. It would provide 20 million dollars over two years in grants that can be used to grow the impact of anti-hunger programs on campus. Colleges and universities can use this funding to create SNAP enrollment opportunities, set up meal-swipe sharing programs, expand campus pantries, and much more.

As New York continues to recover from the pandemic and its economic loss, I ask that you and your colleagues support the Hunger-Free Campus bills this year and pass this bill out of committee and into the state budget. Our state's students are counting on your leadership at this moment, and I know that together we can build stronger communities, families, and a more thriving New York.