



Dear Committee Chair Krueger, Committee Chair Weinstein, and Committee Members,

Swipe Out Hunger is a national nonprofit committed to ending college student hunger, working on more than 550 campuses including nearly every SUNY and CUNY school. I speak today in support of the Hunger Free Campus Grant funding (A. 2645-Rosenthal / A. 2913-May) and the appropriation into the state budget to support this imperative program. We are joined in support by a broad coalition of stakeholders from across New York, including community-based organizations, local food banks, campus administrations, college student affairs staff, and students fighting to address hunger.

Even before the pandemic, hundreds of thousands of New York students struggled to survive economically and meet their basic needs while pursuing their degree. In 2019, 48% of CUNY students<sup>1</sup> and 40% of SUNY students<sup>2</sup> struggled with food insecurity. Black, Latino, Native American, former foster youth, and student-parents experienced the highest food hardship rates.

Since the pandemic, this crisis has only grown to levels never seen before. With rising inflation, no item has grown more in price in the last year than groceries (13%)<sup>3</sup>. Pandemic-era government relief programs have ended, impacting tens of thousands of NY students. From the end of SNAP emergency allotments to the cutting off of SNAP eligibility to thousands of NY students, NY campus pantries have never seen this level level of need.

While Governor Cuomo mandated in 2019 that all public institutions of higher education in New York have food pantries on campus - this mandate did not and has not produced any resources for campuses to start, grow and sustain these pantries. According to a 2020 study by Healthy CUNY, out of 9 CUNY pantries, only 1 had a budget of over \$20,000, 5 had a budget between \$10,000 and \$20,000, and 3 had a budget less than \$10,000. None of the schools received funding from the CUNY system, their institutions, city, or state<sup>4</sup>.

We have been left with a patchwork of deteriorating or missing services, wholly funded by students themselves or an occasional small nonprofit grant.

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<sup>1</sup> Healthy CUNY and the Hope Center for College Community and Justice. "🍷." *THE STATE OF FOOD SECURITY AT CUNY in 2020.*, 10 August 2022, [https://cunyurbanfoodpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CUNY-UFPI\\_food-security\\_v07\\_Final.pdf](https://cunyurbanfoodpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CUNY-UFPI_food-security_v07_Final.pdf). Accessed 16 February 2023.

<sup>2</sup> SUNY Food Insecurity Task Force. "September 2019 FINAL REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES." *Food Insecurity Task Force*, <https://az659834.vo.msecnd.net/eventsairsthusprod/production-sunycpd-public/258f4a70bd6c4fd0be3ea6b414ac3dff>. Accessed 16 February 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Nova, Annie. "How to save on groceries as CPI 'food at home' prices soar." *CNBC*, 14 October 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/14/how-to-save-on-groceries-as-cpi-food-at-home-prices-soar.html>. Accessed 16 February 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Healthy CUNY and the Hope Center for College Community and Justice. "🍷." *THE STATE OF FOOD SECURITY AT CUNY in 2020.*, 10 August 2022, [https://cunyurbanfoodpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CUNY-UFPI\\_food-security\\_v07\\_Final.pdf](https://cunyurbanfoodpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CUNY-UFPI_food-security_v07_Final.pdf). Accessed 16 February 2023.

Examples include and are not limited to:

- **SUNY Oneonta:** Has never received funding from the institution or state to start and grow their food pantry. Therefore, their pantry consists of two shelves on a bookshelf with a handful of granola bars and noodles.
- **SUNY Buffalo:** The largest public institution in the state, funds their pantry through the student activity fee. Forcing economically struggling students to pay for their food pantry. The funds are voted on every year by the student government. In 2022, the Student Government came a few votes short of ending the budget allocation.
- **CUNY City Tech:** Until this semester, CUNY City Tech had a mobile pantry that changed locations each time. This pantry was only open twice a month, for a few hours, by appointment only, through an online form which was broken all of last year.
- **CUNY Hostos Community College:** One of the highest levels of need within the state, CUNY Hostos Community college has gone over a year without a functioning cafeteria. To fill the gap of the increasing need, the staff member in charge of their pantry wrote endless grant applications to keep the pantry open. They were able to open the pantry for a few months due to a small grant. They have never received funding from the institution, system, state, or city.
- **SUNY Schenectady Community College:** To afford food and hygiene products for their students, the staff at SCC collect bottles and cans out of the recycling bins and trash cans at the school to return to a grocery store for change. Relying on this model is a primary source of funding for their pantry.

The Hunger Free Campus grant funding would make significant strides in mitigating food insecurity among college students and support New York in the following ways:

- **Increase Institutions Capacity to Provide Basic Needs Resources to Students:**

Through this funding – which has been passed in California (2017), New Jersey (2019), Maryland (2021), Minnesota (2021), Massachusetts (2021), Pennsylvania (2022), Oklahoma (2022), and Louisiana (2022) – higher education institutions would receive \$10 million in grants to strengthen their existing anti-hunger efforts. New York's colleges could leverage these grants to staff basic needs positions, improve communication outreach, train student wellness advocates, expand universities' SNAP outreach and enrollment, and upgrade existing basic needs resources like food pantries or meal donation Programs.

- **Help Students Access Existing Resources:**

The Hunger Free Campus funding would give colleges the funding needed to raise awareness and increase enrollment in existing on-campus resources and underutilized public benefits. Because of lacking budgets and capacity, many students often need to be aware of the potential

support they could receive. At SUNY, for instance, only 23% of SNAP-eligible students have even considered applying for benefits.<sup>5</sup>

- **Strengthen New York's Economy:**

Investing in basic needs resources to help students complete their degrees is far less expensive than the human and economic cost of inaction. Food-insecure students are more likely to have lower grades and drop out of school than their food-secure classmates. Consequently, students without a higher education degree earn 62% less than those with college degrees. These New Yorkers are 3.5x more likely to live under the federal poverty line, and less than half will have stable health insurance throughout their lives.

Swipe Out Hunger urges your support for the Hunger Free Campus Grant funding in this fiscal year including an appropriation of \$10 million into the state budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration,  
Robb Friedlander

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<sup>5</sup> SUNY Food Insecurity Task Force. "September 2019 FINAL REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES." *Food Insecurity Task Force*, <https://az659834.vo.msecnd.net/eventsairsthusprod/production-sunycpd-public/258f4a70bd6c4fd0be3ea6b414ac3dff>. Accessed 16 February 2023.