

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

The stereotypical concept of poor college students who can only afford to eat ramen and mac and cheese is neither humane nor a rite of passage; it's a violation of their basic human rights to have regular access to adequate, healthy food.

In Feb. 2019, SUNY mandated all 64 campuses to have a food pantry on site or develop partnerships with community pantries that would allow students to use them...and gave a deadline of Dec. 2019 to complete this Herculean task. As our campus representative on the SUNY Food Insecurity Task Force, we worked collaboratively and tirelessly to successfully beat this deadline by 6 weeks. However, we were given no direction on how to develop campus food pantries nor was there financial support to staff them or put food on the shelves. There were no guidelines as to how to be successful in this endeavor; many of us had to fend for ourselves to attain compliance. We're all doing the best we can with what we have.

The Hunger-Free Campus grant funding would earmark and direct funds to public college and university pantries to ameliorate the food insecurity needs of our students. It has been well-researched that filling the gaps in college students' basic needs increases their chances for academic success, retention, and completion of their academic goals, which in turn increases their earning power and often reduces gaps in their basic needs. As the person who oversees our campus food pantry, we simply can't continue to meet our increasing students' needs without this financial assistance.

Jenn Malave' represents the profoundly positive impact our food pantry makes on students' lives. Jenn moved to Schenectady from the Bronx in search of an education and a better life. A family member here took her in and let her sleep on the couch. She came to SUNY Schenectady to study history and took advantage of the pantry's services regularly. Jenn told me on one of her visits that she needed a job and asked whether I knew of any vacancies. I liked her so much that I hired her as a part-time student worker. She essentially managed the day-to-day operations and promoted our shame-free/judgment-free zone policy while she finished her degree. She's now a Political Science major at the University at Albany and works part-time in a professional position in our College's Learning Commons. Jenn lives in a beautiful apartment of her own and just got engaged to be married. She has told me on numerous occasions that the food she was able to get through the pantry made it possible to not have to find a second or third part-time job to make ends meet, so she could devote the time necessary to focus on her education. Jenn is one of our staunchest advocates, and she still encourages every student she encounters to use the pantry's services.

To illustrate the urgency we're facing at the SUNY Schenectady food pantry, comparing the data for the months of January 2022 and January 2023, we had a 272% increase in the number of people placing orders, we fed 311% more people, and we managed a 454% increase in the number of visits. In one month alone! We're struggling financially to meet the astronomical jump in the need for our services, and are worried about how we'll keep up with the pace and remain compliant.

Like most food pantries, we've had to find and rely on external funding sources. Many of us compete for the same grant money. On our campus in particular, we collect bottles and cans to be able to purchase personal care items like deodorant and toothpaste—

which are very expensive and can't be bought with SNAP benefits. For a state-mandated operation such as this, we shouldn't have to beg for money and hold bake sales to keep food on our shelves and our doors open.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Robyn King
Director of Wellness & Support Services
SUNY Schenectady County Community College