Resolution to Establish the Pilot GAPSA Meal Swipe Program (GA/44/BILL/15)

To: Graduate & Professional Student Assembly (GAPSA) - General Assembly

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ABSTRACT:
The Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GAPSA) at the University of Pennsylvania commit to subsidizing meal swipes, meal vouchers, or equivalences, from Penn Dining and Penn Retail Dinings for graduate and professional students. This resolution is motivated by the results from the 2021-2022 Graduate and Professional Student Survey (GPSS) published by Penn Institutional Research & Analysis (IR&A), showing a large number of students facing food insecurity and financial concerns.1 This resolution proposes directing $50,000 in total from the budgets of GAPSA’s Executive Vice President, Advocacy Division, Operations Division, and Finance Division, to establish the Pilot GAPSA Meal Swipe Program.

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WHEREAS, The Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GAPSA) is charged with representing all 16,000 graduate and professional students enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania;

WHEREAS, According to GAPSA Constitution Article I.D, GAPSA shall monitor issues of importance to the graduate and professional student community and foster dialogue among its members for the purpose of identifying relevant issues of advocacy;

WHEREAS, According to the Graduate and Professional Student 2021-2022 survey, with 6680 respondents, 24% of the students responded are classified as “food-insecure” as defined by the USDA;2

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WHEREAS, According to the Graduate and Professional Student 2021-2022 survey, 64% of students view financial commitments as the biggest obstacle to academic progress for graduate students;

WHEREAS, Due to lack of financial resources, 32% of graduate students gave up participation in conferences last year;

WHEREAS, Due to lack of financial resources, 30% of graduate students gave up networking opportunities;

WHEREAS, Due to lack of financial resources, 20% of graduate students gave up research opportunities;

WHEREAS, Food costs in the Philadelphia area rose 11% in 2022 (Consumer Price Index);

WHEREAS, Inflation (federal inflation of 6.4% as of February 2023) and rising costs disproportionately impact already cost-burdened graduate students, particularly students from low-income, working class backgrounds facing precarious socioeconomic situations, students with families, and international students who cannot work extra jobs or apply to external federal fundings due to their visa statues;

WHEREAS, Graduate and professional students often face extra barriers to access affordable stores and nutritious food options, and to prepare meals, owing to reasons such as constrained hours due to classes, research, field studies, teaching, and other commitments.

WHEREAS, Both the University of Pennsylvania and GAPSA derive strength from the diversity of its students;

WHEREAS, Inclusion is one of the three central tenets of the Penn Compact 2022, along with Innovation and Impact;³

WHEREAS, Lack of funds to cover the rising costs of food impedes students’ ability to contribute to Penn’s vibrant intellectual community, causing a rift in accessing educational opportunities along socioeconomic lines; now therefore; be it

RESOLVED, GAPSA shall initially purchase $50,000 worth of meal swipes, meal vouchers, or equivalences (about $20-$22 per swipe or voucher), for graduate and professional students to use at Penn Dining or at Penn Retail Dining. Meal vouchers will be available for pick up at campus locations such as the Graduate Student Center.

RESOLVED, GAPSA General Assembly authorizes the following allocations to fund this pilot program: $10,000 from EVP Special Project (Budget Line Item 1.2); $8000 from EVP Leadership Development (Budget Line Item 1.3); $10,000 from Advocacy Division Development (Budget Line Item 5.5); $2,000 from Equity & Access Committee (Budget Line Item 5.1); $10,000 from Operations Division Development (Budget Line Item 3.5); and $10,000 from the Finance Division’s Discretionary Fund (Budget Line Item 2.2). The total GAPSA’s contribution to this pilot program is $50,000.

RESOLVED, Based on utilization, GAPSA will consider adding a separate budget line item for the GAPSA Meal Swipe Program in future years’ provisional budgets.

FINALLY, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that this pilot Meal Swipe Program reflects GAPSA’s unwavering commitment to collaborate with University partners to combat food insecurity and support student wellness.