



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact: Ethan Milich emilich@nycommunities.org

Release Date: May 18, 2023

MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.2913-A (May) / A.2645 (L. Rosenthal)

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to establishing the "hunger-free campus act"; and making an appropriation therefor.

SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS:

The bill establishes the "Hunger-Free Campus Act" to address food insecurity among students at public and private higher education institutions.

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT:

New York's institutions of higher education provide a pathway for low-income students to achieve upward mobility and uplift their families and communities out of poverty. At CUNY alone, 1 in 10 students are working to create a brighter future for their children. Yet, from Brooklyn to Buffalo, hundreds of thousands of students are struggling to economically survive and meet their basic needs while pursuing their degree. In 2019, 48% of CUNY students and 40% of SUNY students struggled with food insecurity. Black, Latinx, Native American, former foster youth, and student-parents experienced the highest rates of food hardship. The economic fallout of the pandemic has only exacerbated the prevalence of hunger on New York's college campuses. Right now at this moment, as students take their final exams, there are thousands of students who do not know when or how they will receive their next meal.

While most New York colleges have taken action to mitigate food and housing insecurity on campus, many are unable to sufficiently meet their students' basic needs without additional support. In light of the social, economic, and health benefits associated with earning a college degree or certificate, fueling an equitable recovery from the pandemic requires prioritizing students' basic needs so they can remain in school.

The Hunger Free Campus bill 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 similar bills passed in California (2017), New Jersey (2019), Maryland (2021), and Minnesota (2021) – higher education institutions receive 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. Setting up a framework now for these increased resources is important.

➤ **Help Students Access Existing Resources:** The Hunger Free Campus Act would help colleges raise awareness and increase enrollment in existing on-campus resources and underutilized public benefits. Because of lacking budgets and capacity, many students are often unaware of the potential support that they could receive. At SUNY, for instance, only 23% of SNAP-eligible students have even considered applying for benefits. Raising awareness about these programs and providing enrollment assistance would allow students to claim the millions of federal dollars that are currently on the table unused, helping them secure access to healthy food. In one semester, UC campuses used Hunger Free Campus funding to enroll 10,376 students in CalFresh, drawing in over \$12.5 million in federal funds.

➤ **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. When students are food insecure, they are more likely to have lower grades and drop out of school than their food-secure classmates. In consequence, students without a higher education degree earn 62% less than those with college degrees. These New Yorkers are 3.5x more likely to be living under the federal poverty line and less than half will have stable health insurance through their career. Building a vibrant and economically strong New York requires making small fiscal investments today that provides our students with the opportunity to contribute to the growing New York of tomorrow.

The CUNY RISING ALLIANCE and its [20+ member organizations](#) urge you to support this legislation.