

SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

The Honorable David Scott
Chairman House Agriculture Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman House Ed and Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Glenn "G.T." Thompson
Ranking Member House Agriculture Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member House Ed and Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bobby Scott, Chairman David Scott, Ranking Member Foxx and Ranking Member Thompson:

As college students across the nation return to campus amidst an on-going pandemic, the crisis of basic needs security remains a pernicious challenge for those with financial need, made all the more stressful by sunseting state-of-emergency supports. We the undersigned student-serving and advocacy organizations, are writing to urge passage of the Enhanced Access To SNAP (EATS) Act of 2021 ([H.R. 1919 /S. 2515](#)) and/or the Student Food Security Act ([H.R.3100/ S. 1569](#)) in upcoming congressional action. Both these bicameral bills would expand access to critical food supports through the Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by alleviating the outdated and restrictive work requirement that targets college students with demonstrated financial need.

Increase access to SNAP by passing EATS Act and/or Student Food Security Act

These bicameral bills extend the existing federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to students from low-income backgrounds by eliminating or alleviating accordingly, the redundant "SNAP Student eligibility rule" that discriminates against people attending college at least half-time. The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act provided a temporary exemption to allow students with an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of zero or Federal Work-Study eligibility to be eligible for SNAP, in lieu of the work requirement. This put SNAP within reach of an [estimated 2.5 million undergraduates and nearly 500,000 graduate students](#). However, this temporary extension is set to expire. The Student Food Security Act would make this exemption permanent, as well as expand federal resources for colleges to provide hunger alleviation programs to students. The EATS Act would add, "attending an institution of higher education," as a form of qualification to be eligible for SNAP in addition to demonstrated financial need.

College students' food insecurity is an ongoing crisis

The Hope Center for College Community and Justice, a leading research and reporting organization of college students' basic needs, found that students of color are more likely to experience basic needs insecurity, including food insecurity, than their white peers. According to their March 2021 report *"Seventy-five percent of Indigenous students, 70 percent of Black students and 64 percent of Hispanic or Latino students experienced basic needs insecurity, compared with 54 percent of white students."* A separate [study completed in 2020](#) before COVID-19 forced campus-closures nationwide, found that college students forgo meals or otherwise change eating habits as a first recourse to affording educational costs they face beyond their tuition bills. The pandemic has exacerbated student hunger such that [29% of four-year and 39% of two-year college students reported being food insecure](#) during the 2020-21 academic year. As one student noted, *"Students on full financial aid, such as myself, face difficult decisions of how to stretch funds for books, transportation, rent and food; and with such a limited budget, we can't have it all. Budgeting worries, such as my ability to feed myself, now occupy more space in my mind than my actual studies."* Given that [39 percent of today's college students come from low-income backgrounds and 51 percent are financially independent](#) from their families, untenable choices between basic needs like food and funding their costs of attendance are far too common.

College coursework IS work

The outdated federal work requirement for SNAP disadvantages first-generation, low income students, disproportionately Black, Latinx and Indigenous students, by requiring them to prioritize and continually prove wage work hours while attending to postsecondary coursework. Research shows that [students who work over 15 hours a week are more likely to have lower academic performance](#). For most low-income college students without dependents to be eligible for SNAP under the student ban, they must consistently work 20 hours per week. This means time away from college studies, support services, campus activities and even rest needed to maintain mental and physical health. There are also additional costs associated with working half-time such as travel, uniforms, security clearances and childcare. This onerous requirement disincentivizes students to access SNAP benefits even when they qualify financially.

Eligible college students with food insecurity are not accessing SNAP

A pre-pandemic [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) report on college student food insecurity](#) showed that fewer than half of the 3.3 million students who were potentially eligible for SNAP participated in the program. They noted that while many colleges and universities have responded to this growing crisis, *"helping students understand complicated SNAP rules"* was an ongoing need. In its #RealCollege on-going pandemic report, The Hope Center found that only 18 percent of students with basic needs insecurity accessed this critical food assistance in the last year. Those that do gain access to nearly [\\$300 per month of supplemental food assistance](#) for a single person, and can apply their limited funds to other basic needs beyond their tuition bill such as healthcare, housing, textbooks and transportation.

Postsecondary degrees are necessary for the economic recovery

Students at the most risk of basic needs insecurity are less likely to enroll and persist in college at a time when postsecondary degrees are needed more than ever. [Enrollment and retention has declined](#) during the pandemic. Colleges lost [approximately 400,000 new or returning students](#) since the pandemic started, and declines are particularly pronounced for Black and Native American students. Evidence shows that [enrollment in SNAP provides a significant increase in retention](#) rates amongst students experiencing basic needs insecurity. With [65 percent of jobs requiring postsecondary credentials](#) in the economic recovery labor market, and 70 percent projected by 2027, it is incumbent on federal policymakers to ensure college students, especially those from under-resourced communities who [pay over 150% of their household earnings to get a degree](#), are provided equitable access to federal food assistance like SNAP.

Staggering numbers of students, disproportionately students of color, forgo regular, nutritious food in order to afford college costs. Substantial levels of federal assistance in recent relief packages supported college students during the pandemic, yet the ongoing college hunger crisis threatens the impact of these investments in our students. It's beyond time for Congress to account postsecondary coursework as "work" for students who invest their energy and resources, along with those of taxpayers and higher education stakeholders, to obtain the critical postsecondary degrees needed for today's labor market and our nation's recovery. We urge Congress to take the next opportunity to support college students' food security and ultimate success by passing the EATS and/or Student Food Security Act.

[signatures]