

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5033

AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT

Title: PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

Vote Date: 3/3/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/17/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To require public higher education institutions to work with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to assess and address the issue of food insecurity on campuses by administering a biennial survey to collect data on food-insecure students, as well as evaluate the institution's offered programming regarding food insecurity.

Substitute language:

- Lines 84-87: removes language requiring higher education institution financial aid offices to identify students as being potentially eligible for SNAP

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Terrence Cheng, President, Connecticut State Colleges & Universities \(CSCU\)](#): CSCU shares "the Committee's deep concern for food insecurity among our students," as the issue of "food insecurity affects [students'] ability to pursue higher education." Because the pandemic has exacerbated this issue, CSCU "would support regularly surveying students to keep on top of their needs and to inform our efforts to help address food insecurity through pantries and community partnerships." CSCU recommends that students contact the Department of Social Services (DSS) with regard to the portions of [H.B. 5033](#) that refer to SNAP benefits, and CSCU wishes to partner with the DSS in the future to expand these benefits and programs. In Section 4 of [H.B. 5033](#), CSCU recommends "against placing the outreach responsibility on the financial aid offices," but instead, CSCU suggests "broader outreach to our student community and referrals to DSS."

[Jeffrey Shoulson, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, University of Connecticut](#): UConn is "supportive of this bill and its requirement of a biennial survey," as well as its "designation of all Work-Study eligible students as eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) pursuant to the Federal Food and Nutrition Act of 2008." Statistical data provided by UConn's Rudd Food Policy and Obesity Center shows that "the rate of food insecurity at our regional campuses (Avery Point, Hartford, Stamford, and Waterbury) is notably higher than at the main campus in Storrs." This discrepancy can be attributed to many factors, including "the availability of a comprehensive meal plan in Storrs and the lack of such a plan at any of the regional campuses." To address this issue, UConn's Chief Financial Officer has been working to "develop additional short-term and long-term strategies to address the challenges of food insecurity on each of the campuses." Finally, through UConn's "network of student support services, we are committed to ensuring that all students who are eligible and wish to enroll in SNAP will be able to do so, whether they are Storrs-based or at one of our regional campuses."

[Marlene Schwartz, Director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Health, University of Connecticut](#): The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Health "strongly support[s]" [H.B. 5033](#), as statistics from around the country show that "food insecurity among college students is a serious problem that the pandemic has made worse." Because food insecurity undermines a student's ability to succeed academically, "it is in the best interest of institutions of higher education to address this issue." From research conducted in 2019 and 2020, it was revealed that "Students on the regional campuses reported substantially higher rates of food insecurity than students in Storrs," and that in general, students who were food insecure "were more likely to report that they have missed class, missed assignments, and have considered dropping out." One recommendation that's suggested in order "to strengthen this bill," is that "all Connecticut institutions of higher education should include the same set of validated questions based on the USDA's 18-item Food Insecurity Module."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[David Acquaaah-Mensah, Resident, New Haven](#): Mr. Acquaaah-Mensah offers "strong support" for [H.B. 5033](#) because statistically, "Black and low-income students are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity," and "Students experiencing food insecurity have a lower average GPA and higher rates of depression and nutrition deficiencies." Other states have passed Hunger-Free Campus Acts, which are "remarkably similar to" [H.B. 5033](#), and include programs like food pantries on campuses, SNAP enrollment opportunities, and "Swipe Out Hunger programs." Food insecurity affects a student's "ability to perform well in and out of school," and it also has a "life-long impact on their development and livelihood."

[Julieth Callejas, Interim Executive Director, End Hunger Connecticut! \(EHC!\)](#): EHC! supports the policies and plans outlined in [H.B. 5033](#), which would create "a course of action to address shortcomings and enhance existing strategies." With rising costs in tuition, housing, and meal plans, many young adults are forced to decide "between buying textbooks and food." Despite "multiple federal food assistance programs available to help prevent childhood hunger," young adults lose access to these programs once they graduate high school and pursue higher education. End Hunger Connecticut! "envision[s] a future where no college student is food-insecure because they have a variety of resources" that are available to them in order to help them succeed. Examples include "SNAP assistance, on campus food pantries, and low-cost dining options," and [H.B. 5033](#) will "help students navigate their

college years successfully, unburdened by the stress of wondering where their next meal will come from," as well as "adjust current regulations to reflect the reality of modern students' lives."

[Lily Forand, Director of External Affairs, University of Connecticut's Undergraduate Student Government](#): If UConn continues to be a "premiere" university that touts "what is truly an exceptional student body," then it cannot leave "students and future change-makers hungry," and must address the issue of food insecurity. For on-campus students, there is often a lack of nutrition and variety in meals that are offered to them, and for off-campus students, they do not have sufficient affordable options and programming offered to them. Also, for students who attend regional campuses, they "lack any options, and often are stuck eating fast food in their cars." In conclusion, [H.B. 5033](#) would provide "another chance to survey the student body" about food insecurity and therefore, students "from Stamford to Storrs and every campus in between," can feel that "Our concerns can be heard and our needs can at least begin to be addressed."

[Seth Freeman, President, Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges \(4Cs\)](#): The 4Cs "strongly supports" [H.B. 5033](#) and "strongly advocates" for its passage. While many students in public K-12 schools have access to "free and reduced-priced breakfast and lunches," food insecurity continues to plague young adults who pursue a college education, making it "one of the many non-academic barriers that prevents our students from achieving success in higher education."

[Mildred Guzman-Young, Student, Central Connecticut State University \(CCSU\)](#): Students need help with access to "a primary need for survival...food," and without constant "adequate nutrition, the development of our students' brains and bodies are negatively impacted." Food insecurity places college students "at a great disadvantage," hindering "their ability to learn, to get good grades and to graduate." This, in effect, prevents them from obtaining an education and a good job in the future, as many students skip meals because "they do not have enough money to eat." With inflation rising, as well as prices for gas and food, many college students have to choose between putting gas into their car and going to school or not eating, and many unfortunately choose the latter. Therefore, Ms. Guzman-Young supports [H.B. 5033](#) so that it may "require public institutions of higher education to assess and address food insecurity among students."

[Jason Jakubowski, President & CEO, Connecticut Foodshare](#): Connecticut Foodshare supports [H.B. 5033](#), as it is "a first step in ensuring that students in need receive appropriate aid." Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the amount of food insecure residents in Connecticut rose from one out of every eight people to one out of every seven, and the impact of this need can be seen on college campuses from students seeking help through Connecticut Foodshare's SNAP Outreach Program, as well as its "mobile pantry-on-wheels programs." For many low-income young adults who want to pursue a degree in higher education, "college is a path to breaking the cycle of poverty," but "too many of these students are struggling to afford their basic needs," like adequate food, which can undermine educational performance. Finally, because food insecurity continues to rise due to the pandemic, Connecticut Foodshare stands "ready to partner with the members of this committee and higher education institutions across the state to reach a day where every college student has access to the food they need to succeed."

[Patty O'Neill, President, Connecticut State University – American Association of United Professors \(CSU-AAUP\)](#): CSU-AAUP "emphatically supports" [H.B. 5033](#) not only because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has "made matters worse," but because "people need food to survive and thrive." Each CSU campus hosts a food pantry for its students because when students are hungry, it has a substantial negative impact on their physical and mental health and well-being, as well as their grade point averages. Therefore, CSU-AAUP urges the passage of [H.B. 5033](#), as it will ensure that "students have their basic needs met so they can focus on learning," since "Our students are the future of our state."

[Asija Qyteza, Waterbury Associated Student Government President, University of Connecticut](#): Asija Qyteza, offers "strong support" for [H.B. 5033](#) because it is "crucial...to be passed to address the concerns of every food-insecure student at UConn," especially at UConn's regional campuses where the issue is more prevalent. The UConn Waterbury campus "ranks as the second most affected campus by food insecurity," and in a survey conducted in 2020, "38% of respondents at UConn reported being food insecure." These statistics raise concerns about the health and well-being of UConn's students, and "racial minority students are more affected by food insecurity than white students which raises further concerns." A survey conducted by UConn "to assess the status of food insecurity on campus" would help the University with outlining the "necessary actions to address this issue across campuses." Commuting also interferes with a student's "ability to eat while they are not at school because they do not have time to prepare or purchase food prior to coming on campus, and many students do not have access to dining options." This affects students' physical and mental health, making the issue of food insecurity "extremely urgent," and [H.B. 5033](#) should be "reported favorably in order to lead to necessary change."

[Rosemary Redrovan, Student, University of Connecticut Waterbury Campus](#): Ms. Redrovan supports [H.B. 5033](#), as well as a mandatory survey for students in an effort to "see what food insecurity problems exist so that they can address the problem and make the changes that are necessary." As both a first-year college student and a commuter, it is difficult to "have access to affordable and good quality food" off-campus when the entire day is spent on-campus, and therefore, Ms. Redrovan must rely on "whatever is available surrounding my area which tends to be fast food." This affects students' physical and mental health, as well as their ability to "learn and grow." More importantly, this constant lack of "nutritious food can definitely cause chronic conditions that students must live with and pay with their own money." [H.B. 5033](#) will address this problem so that students are "fully able to function during our classes and study sessions."

[Colena Sesanker, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Gateway Community College](#): As a community college professor, Ms. Sesanker is "painfully aware of how food insecurity compromises our students' prospects." Therefore, Ms. Sesanker supports [H.B. 5033](#), as well as "any effort to address the unique challenges that are faced by students."

[Nahum Valiente, Vice President of the Student Government Association, University of Connecticut Stamford Campus](#): While food insecurity is an issue on all UConn campuses, "Stamford students experience even greater struggles" because according to UConn's Report on Food Insecurity from February 2020, "67% of respondent students reported either low or very low food security." Many students "request and rely" on the Student Government Association "to host programming that would provide food for them," as this problem "has become a substantial concern for" them. Therefore, [H.B. 5033](#) should be passed into law in

order to address this issue "with the utmost attention from the State Legislature," and thus, bring "relief to our organization in meeting the demands of our students" and bring relief to the students themselves.

An additional [21 written testimonies](#) were offered in support of [H.B. 5033](#):

- [Dylan Council, Resident, New Haven](#)
- [Spencer Dicembrino, Member, University of Connecticut's Undergraduate Student Government:](#)
- [Josh Guo, Student, Yale University:](#)
- [Delinah Hailey, Resident, New Haven:](#)
- [Radeana Hastings, Graduate Intern, Central Connecticut State University \(CCSU\):](#)
- [Michael Hernández, Student, University of Connecticut:](#)
- [Tri Ho, Student, Yale University:](#)
- [Tioné Hoeckner, Resident, New Haven:](#)
- [Aparajita Kaphle, Resident, New Haven](#)
- [Joy Liu, Resident, New Haven](#)
- [Eliza Lord, Resident, New Haven](#)
- [Julia Mazur, Student, University of Connecticut](#)
- [Isabella Morales, Resident, New Haven](#)
- [Bradley Nowacek, Resident, New Haven](#)
- [Miles Quarterman, Resident, New Haven](#)
- [Brook Smith, Resident, New Haven](#)
- [Peter Spinelli, Chief of Staff to the Vice President of the Student Body within the Undergraduate Student Government, University of Connecticut](#)
- [Julia Sulkowski, Resident, New Haven](#)
- [Stephen Monroe Tomczak, Professor, Southern Connecticut State University](#)
- [Luke Villani, Student, University of Connecticut](#)
- [Alison Weir, Attorney and Policy Advocate, Greater Hartford Legal Aid \(GHCLA\)](#)

Six verbal testimonies were offered in support of [H.B. 5033](#):

- [Jaime Foster, Representative of the 57th District, Connecticut General Assembly](#)
- [Ethan Werstler, Student Body Vice President, University of Connecticut](#)
- [John O'Connor, Professor of Sociology, Central Connecticut State University \(CCSU\)](#)
- [Srimayi Chaturvedula, Food & Housing Equity, University of Connecticut Praxis](#)
- [Maria Kelley, President of Creating Caring Communities, University of Connecticut](#)
- [Patty Burke, Vice President for Part-Timers, Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges \(4Cs\)](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed for House Bill 5033

Reported by: Austin Hyatt

Date: 3/16/2022