



# TESTIMONY

May 20, 2025

Kate Sopko & Piet van Lier

## Testimony to the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee on HB 157

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee. We are Kate Sopko and Piet van Lier, representing Policy Matters Ohio, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization creating a more vibrant, equitable, sustainable and inclusive Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 157.

Policy Matters Ohio believes that everyone in our state deserves the opportunity to pursue their educational goals, and we strongly support investing state funding into helping more Ohioans, especially those who have traditionally been excluded, complete postsecondary education and training.

That is why we recommend that H.B. 157, a powerful bipartisan opportunity to mitigate hunger on Ohio campuses, be added to H.B. 96, the state's biennial budget. The time to act is now, with the budget, to ensure this help arrives soon enough to help students during the coming school year. We also recommend that the legislature allocate \$2.5 million, the amount originally proposed in H.B. 590 from the last General Assembly, rather than H.B. 157's current proposed allocation of \$625,000 over the biennium.

The bill would require Ohio's Chancellor of Higher Education to create the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program and award grants to implement services like on-campus food pantries, food bank partnerships and emergency assistance for students. In doing so, these measures would fortify Ohio students' ability to complete degrees and certifications.

### Food insecurity on campus

As is true across the nation, many students enrolled in Ohio colleges and universities struggle to pay for basic needs like food, shelter, and medical care while working on their degrees and certificates.

Nationwide, three out of five student respondents to The Hope Center at Temple University's 2023-2024 Student Basic Needs Survey<sup>1</sup> reported difficulty securing adequate food and/or housing, with 41% of respondents having experienced food insecurity within the previous 30 days. Nearly 75% of Indigenous and Black student respondents reported food and/or housing insecurity compared to 55% of white

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<sup>1</sup> [2023-2024 Student Basic Needs Survey Report](#). The Hope Center, February 2025.

This survey consisted of 74,350 student respondents from 91 colleges and universities located in 16 states.

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*Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.*



students, and 52% of Pell Grant recipient respondents reported experiencing food insecurity compared to 35% of non-Pell students.

The survey found a substantial link between students struggling to meet basic needs and being unable to complete degrees or certificates. Of respondents who had previously stopped out and re-enrolled in college or who were considering stopping their studies, fully 79% named insecurity around basic needs or financial concerns as their reasons. A 2021 Public Health Nutrition paper echoed this connection, finding that 44% of food-insecure students in the study sample completed their degrees, compared to 68% of food-secure students.<sup>2</sup>

Closer to home, in May 2021 the non-profit Swipe Out Hunger surveyed school administrators across Ohio to better understand food insecurity on our campuses. Among administrators surveyed from 53 institutions, public institutions ranked food security at 7.9 on a scale of 1-10 in terms of its importance to retaining students and ensuring student success.<sup>3</sup>

Students undertake higher education as an investment in their futures, and, on average, earning a postsecondary certificate or degree does indeed increase earning potential. The New York Federal Reserve showed a median income for people with a bachelor's degree of \$60,000 in 2024, while those with a high school diploma earned a median income of \$40,000.<sup>4</sup> A 2020 Urban Institute study showed that average annual earnings of certificate holders are 10% higher than those of otherwise similar high school graduates.<sup>5</sup>

But these enhanced earnings only happen when students are able to complete their degrees. As of 2022, Ohio had just over 1.25 million adults under the age of 65 who had attained some college credit without earning a degree or credential.<sup>6</sup>

The Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program would provide tailored support for students who are at risk of stopping out of college programs because they cannot cover basic needs alongside tuition and fees.

In joining states that have passed similar legislation — including California, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and Washington — Ohio would help take the lead in fighting food insecurity on campuses. Such leadership is particularly important as food prices continue to increase.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wolfson, Insolera, Cohen and Leung, [The effect of food insecurity during college on graduation and type of degree attained: evidence from a nationally representative longitudinal survey](#). Public Health Nutrition, July 29, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> [Hunger Free Campus Flyer](#). Swipe Out Hunger, Updated 2024.

<sup>4</sup> [Federal Reserve Bank of New York](#). February 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Baum, Holzer and Luetmer, [Should the Federal Government Fund Short-Term Postsecondary Certificate Programs?](#) The Urban Institute, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> [Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes: 2024 Report for the Nation and the States](#). National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, June 6, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> [Food Price Outlook, 2025](#). USDA Economic Research Service, Updated April 25, 2025.



### **The threat of increased campus food insecurity**

Proposed funding shifts at the federal level could further exacerbate Ohio's campus-hunger rates. Among other unpredictable changes, a historically large proposed \$300 billion cut to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) included in the House's proposed budget reconciliation bill would fundamentally re-shape what food assistance is available to students over the next decade. Among the proposed changes to SNAP include shifting the program from being fully federally funded, to having states take on a minimum of 5% (and up to 25%) of food benefit costs beginning in FY 2028.<sup>8</sup> Proposed eligibility changes could also make it harder for part-time students to attain a Pell Grant.<sup>9</sup>

Especially given such uncertainty, enacting the Hunger-Free Campus Act through HB 96 and increasing the amount allocated to combat food-insecurity would be huge steps toward building student success across our state. Everyone in Ohio deserves access to healthy, nourishing food — including the Ohio students who will help shape our future.

Thank you for this opportunity, and please feel free to reach out to us at [ksopko@policymattersohio.org](mailto:ksopko@policymattersohio.org) and [pvanlier@policymattersohio.org](mailto:pvanlier@policymattersohio.org) with any questions you may have.

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<sup>8</sup> Katie Bergh and Dottie Rosenbaum, [House Agriculture Committee Proposal Would Worsen Hunger, Hit State Budgets Hard](#). Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, May 13, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Sara Partridge, [Congressional Republicans' Proposed Budget Reconciliation Bill Imperils 4.4 Million Pell Grant Recipients](#). The Center for American Progress, May 13, 2025.