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Policy Brief: What a Hunger-Free Campus Law Could Mean for New York's #RealCollege Students

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Hunger-free campus laws are spreading quickly to help students meet their basic needs. The time has come to bring these laws to New York. Student surveys show widespread food insecurity in higher education, both nationally and in New York. Hunger-Free Campus laws support and incentivize colleges to confront food insecurity on their campuses.

Widespread Food Insecurity at CUNY

Many students in the City University of New York (CUNY) system experience food insecurity. The 2018 #RealCollege survey found that almost half of CUNY students experienced food insecurity in the past month.¹ A survey of students by Healthy CUNY during the height of the pandemic, April 2020, revealed that six out of ten CUNY students experienced reduced access to food in the previous two weeks.² Healthy CUNY also learned that food insecurity was strongly associated with anxiety and depression, both of which many students faced during the pandemic.³

The federal Supplementary Needs Assistance Program (SNAP) can be a critical tool in helping prevent food insecurity and financial hardship.⁴ Yet complex, needlessly strict eligibility standards and inadequate outreach limit students' access to SNAP. Low-income students who attend college more than half-time must meet onerous work requirements or meet a series of exemptions that limit their access and undermine academic success.⁵

In January 2021, Congress temporarily expanded SNAP eligibility to waive work requirements for any student eligible to participate in work-study or with a sufficiently low income that their Expected Family Contribution is \$0.⁶ The enhanced eligibility will lapse 30 days after Congress lifts the COVID-19 health emergency.⁷ While expanded SNAP is essential, a comprehensive solution to campus food insecurity requires states and institutions of higher education to build capacity, and implement a number of strategies and programs, that meet the needs of their student body.

Colleges across New York have started to undertake efforts to combat student food insecurity:

- The CUNY Food Security Advocates Project empowers students at Hostos Community and John Jay Colleges to create media campaigns to raise awareness about campus food insecurity and guide their fellow students to services and resources.⁸
- Kingsborough Community College established an organic, year-round food production site called the KCC Urban Farm which grows and distributes thousands of pounds of produce each year. KCC also teaches students how to cook the produce through its “Bring It Home” program.⁹
- Onondaga Community College launched a Food Insecurity Task Force in 2013, prompting the college to create a food pantry the following year.¹⁰ Since then, Onondaga has increased the offerings and hours of the food pantry and established a partnership with the Central New York Food Bank. Additionally, Food Link provides short-term food aid and connects students with community and government resources for long-term assistance.
- SUNY Fredonia made non-perishable food available to students the last three weeks of the semester – a time when campus food service is limited – but a needs assessment reflected that students needed semester-long food assistance. Now, the campus has a website available exclusively to students, which allows them to access food at any point during the semester through a confidential email, and they have also partnered with a local food pantry for food deliveries.
- In August 2018, then-Governor Andrew Cuomo launched the No Student Goes Hungry Program. The program directed CUNY and the State University of New York (SUNY) to establish a food pantry or alternative food source on every college campus by the end of the Fall 2018 semester.¹¹ Food pantries may help draw attention to the problem of campus food insecurity, and evidence suggests that in order to be effective they must be part of a centralized system of access to public benefits, emergency aid, and other services.¹²

New York Can Lead on Hunger-Free Campus Legislation

Enacting model state legislation to establish hunger-free campuses helps combat college food insecurity. Four states have enacted hunger-free campus laws and legislators in eight other states have proposed them.¹³ Colleges that implement the bundle of interventions created by hunger-free campus laws are designated “hunger-free campuses” and may receive funding from the state to enact their plans.

Hunger-free campus laws recognize the need to pursue multiple strategies at once to address the crisis of food insecurity. The laws provide food and outreach to SNAP-eligible students. They also spotlight food insecurity in higher education, reducing the stigma felt by food-insecure students and building momentum for lasting policy change.

Colleges and universities in the four states with hunger-free campus laws must meet certain requirements in order to qualify their institution as a Hunger-Free Campus. While these requirements vary state by state, they generally follow a similar pattern and build in maximum flexibility for lower resourced institutions.

The New York State Legislature should pass the Hunger-Free Campus Act, S1151/A6881 to significantly aid students experiencing food insecurity.

To be labeled a hunger-free campus, New York four-year institutions of higher education must complete the following requirements:

- Establish a hunger task force which includes student representatives from the student body that meets a minimum of three times per academic year to set at least two goals with action plans;
- Designate a staff member responsible for assisting students with SNAP enrollment;
- Provide options for students to utilize snap benefits at campus stores OR provide students with information on establishments in the surrounding area of campus where they can utilize SNAP EBT benefits;
- Hold an awareness day campaign activity or event during the national hunger and homelessness awareness week;
- Provide at least one physical food pantry on campus, OR enable students to receive food through a separate, stigma-free arrangement. such campus may partner with a local food bank or food pantry to meet the requirements of this subparagraph;
- Develop a student meal credit donation program, OR designate a certain amount of funds for free food vouchers that might otherwise be raised through such a program. Each institution of higher education may develop its own procedures for a meal donation program; and
- Annually conduct a student survey on hunger, developed by the commissioner, and submit the results of the survey and a best practice campus profile to the commissioner at a time prescribed by the commissioner for inclusion.

To be labeled a hunger-free campus, New York two-year institutions of higher education must complete the following requirements:

- Establish a hunger task force which includes student representatives from the student body that meets a minimum of three times per academic year to set at least two goals with action plans;
- Designate a staff member responsible for assisting students with SNAP enrollment;
- Hold an awareness day campaign activity or event during the national hunger and homelessness awareness week;
- Provide at least one physical food pantry on campus, OR enable students to receive food through a separate, stigma-free arrangement. such campus may partner with a local food bank or food pantry to meet the requirements of this subparagraph;

- Annually conduct a student survey on hunger, developed by the commissioner, and submit the results of the survey and a best practice campus profile to the commissioner at a time prescribed by the commissioner for inclusion.

The state plans to reimburse some of the expenses of the Hunger-Free Campus through a \$20 million state grant fund. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) would have to develop a standard food insecurity survey for colleges to administer annually. The new state funding would take a step in the right direction, but New York would still need to commit additional resources to meaningfully reduce food insecurity at CUNY and SUNY.

Enacting a hunger-free campus law could improve food-insecure students' access to healthy and nutritious foods by enlisting college administrators and staff in anti-hunger activities, connecting students to public resources, and ensuring that institutional systems in higher education meet the needs of all students.

Provision	California (CSU)	Maryland	Minnesota	New Jersey	New York (proposed)
Designated SNAP Student Assistance Coordinator	×	×	×	×	×
On-Campus Food Pantry or Separate Stigma-Free Arrangement	×	×	×	×	×
Meal Credit Donation Program	×			×	×
Hunger-Free Task Force		×		×	×
Participate in Hunger Awareness Events			×	×	×
Work Study Eligibility for SNAP		×			
Conduct Student Surveys		×			×
SNAP Availability at Campus Stores				×	×

For information on state hunger-free campus laws, contact The Hope Center at hopectr@temple.edu.

Notes and References

¹ Goldrick-Rab, S., Coca, V., Baker-Smith, C., and Looker, E (2019). [City University of New York #RealCollege Survey Report](#). The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

² Jones HE, Manze M, Ngo V, Lamberson P, Freudenberg N (2021). [The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on college students' health and financial stability in New York City: Findings from a population-based sample of City University of New York \(CUNY\) students](#). *Journal of Urban Health*. The Hope Center and Healthy CUNY surveys used differing methodologies and time cycles and should therefore not be directly compared.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Food Research & Action Center (2017). [The role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in improving health and well-being](#).

⁵ Gilkesson, P (2021). [Frequently asked questions about SNAP and students](#). CLASP.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education. [Memorandum](#). (February 23, 2021)

⁷ [The Student Food Security Act \(S.1569/H.R.3100\) would make the SNAP exemptions permanent](#).

⁸ Kathleen Delgado (2018). [CUNY Food Security Advocates](#).

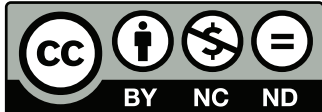
⁹ Kingsborough Community College. [KCC Urban Farm](#).

¹⁰ The State of University of New York. (2019). [“SUNY Schools are Ensuring Students Stay Nourished and Healthy to Increase Success in College.”](#)

¹¹ Hunter College New York City Food Center (2018). [“In New York State, No Student Goes Hungry.”](#)

¹² Price, D. & Umaña, P. (2021). [One Stop Center Models: A Guide to Centralizing Students' Basic Needs Supports](#). The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

¹³ States where hunger-free campus laws have been introduced include Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Washington State.



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