

May 5, 2023

Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain and Members of the Committee,

My name is Angela Hamilton, and I live in Portland and work at Portland State University supervising the student-run PSU Food Pantry. I also serve on our Basic Needs Hub Advisory Board coordinating with our Basic Needs Navigator. I am an alumni of Portland State where I completed my Master's degree. I am writing to request your **support for HB3089** in getting it added to the agenda for the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education.

I believe the passing of the Hunger Free Campuses bill is extremely important because it allocates funding to colleges and universities to address student food security on campuses by establishing food pantries, creating a "Swipe Out Hunger" program, supporting SNAP or other benefit enrollment opportunities, and more. The passing of this bill is extremely important for Portland State University because:

1. **Portland State students report experiencing food insecurity above the national averages.** The average rates of national food security tend to run around 13% for the general population and 33% for four-year higher education institutions. During a late 2019 survey at Portland State, 47% of our students reported experiencing food insecurity in the previous month, the rates of which rose during the pandemic.
2. **The students most affected by food security at Portland State are those who have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education and are part of growing demographics at PSU.** For example, 66% of Native American, 60% of Multiracial, 58% of Hispanic or Latino/a/x/, and 56% of Black or African American students at Portland State report experiencing food insecurity. 63% are transgender and 54% have at least one disability or medical condition,
3. **Research shows that food insecurity affects student success.** Not only is food security a public health concern, but it can become a barrier to completing their degrees and graduating. It causes difficulties with being able to focus on their studies. According to the research by Harvard researchers Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir, scarcity of food can affect the brain in ways that simply make it almost impossible to think about anything other than acquiring food.
4. **Food insecurity affects mental health.** At Portland State, [our study](#) also showed that students experiencing food insecurity report feelings of loneliness and isolation at rates higher than those who are food secure. An emerging body of research in the past ten years has shown that food insecurity can be a traumatizing experience—another way that food insecurity can affect the brain and students' ability to focus on their learning.
5. **The passing of HB 2835, the Benefits Navigator bill, placing Benefits Navigators in colleges and universities has been extremely helpful for connecting students to resources, but more is needed.**
6. **PSU Food Pantry needs to grow urgently.** By March 2023, the PSU Food Pantry had already surpassed the number of students served in an entire year compared to pre-pandemic numbers, and we're still only serving a small sliver of those we know are food insecure. Oregon Food Bank has said that no other pantry among their partner agencies is as large as ours—providing between 3,000 and 6,000 pounds of food each week. We desperately need to expand our hours and have just received nearly \$300,000 in funding to expand our pantry space by December 31, 2023 because the need is so high. The student employees running the pantry are exhausted, food insecure themselves, and we need to be able to hire a full-time coordinator.
7. **Higher education is a viable pathway out of needing social services in the future.** Research has shown that college students know that being food insecure is a temporary sacrifice they are willing to make in order to achieve their higher goals. For many first generation and nontraditional college students, getting their degree is not just a personal goal but a way to help move their families up the socioeconomic ladder. Currently, students

may be making conscious sacrifices to achieve these higher goals but likely do not realize that choosing to go to college may lead to not having enough to eat for themselves and their families. As one of the Pantry student employees says, "*Why is this not an emergency?*"

Being a college student has changed a lot in the past 20 years when I first came to Oregon in 1993 to get my undergraduate degree. The cost of education has risen, the percentage of available aid compared to cost is much less, and the cost of living is much much higher. Fortunately, higher education has been successful at improving access for getting through the door at our public institutions, but unfortunately, we are needing to adapt to the growing basic needs that students struggle to meet while working toward their dreams of having a degree. Passing the Hunger Free Campuses bill is one small step toward not only improving graduation rates and student success but also directly serving a large population of Oregon residents.

Angela Hamilton
Portland