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October 20, 2021

Senator Anne M. Gobi, and
Representative David M. Rogers,
co-chairs Joint Committee on Higher Education
State House, Room 413A
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Testimony in Support of H.1368 / S.822, *An Act establishing the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative*

Dear Chairwoman Gobi, Chairman Rogers, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law & Justice (“Massachusetts Appleseed”) respectfully submits the following testimony in support of H.1368/S.822, *An Act establishing the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative* and strongly urges the Joint Committee on Higher Education to issue a favorable report on the bill.

Massachusetts Appleseed’s mission is to promote equal rights and opportunities for Massachusetts residents by developing and advocating for systemic solutions to social justice issues. Through in-depth research, community problem-solving, and consensus building we develop powerful solutions to pressing social justice challenges.

Central to this work is ensuring that every student in Massachusetts is receiving enough food to perform at their highest potential, including those in public colleges and universities, and community colleges. Recent national and state-level studies have revealed that a significant barrier to creating this equitable environment is the increasing food insecurity among college students, with housing insecurity being an exacerbating factor. Community college students in particular are more greatly impacted by both food and housing insecurity when compared with students attending four-year public colleges and universities. Both H.1368 and S.822 would establish critically needed support for public higher education institutions to address existing gaps in food insecurity on their campuses.

A 2018 survey conducted by the Wisconsin Hope Lab and Massachusetts Department of Higher Education found that 39% of students at four-year colleges and universities reported that they could not afford to eat balanced meals; this percentage rose to 47% for community college students.¹ Similarly, 32% of 4-year college students reported housing insecurity in the past year and 20%

¹ “Basic Needs Insecurity in Massachusetts Public Colleges and Universities.” *Wisconsin Hope Lab and Massachusetts Department of Higher Education*, 11 May 2018, <https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/StillHungryMA-4-1.html>. Accessed 15 September 2021.

reported housing insecurity in the past month. These percentages rose to 47% and 33%, respectively, for community college students.² This data was further reflected in a 2019 survey conducted by the Hope Center with Massachusetts public higher education institutions. The data revealed that 37% of college students experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days and 43% and 17% of students experienced housing insecurity and homelessness in the previous year, respectively.³

Crucially, the 2018 Massachusetts report concluded that food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness are likely to intersect for many students.⁴ Among the Massachusetts community college students surveyed, 23% reported both housing and food insecurity in the past year and 9% reported experiencing food and housing insecurity and homelessness in the same period. Six percent of four-year college students reported experiencing all three types of insecurity.⁵ Food and housing insecurity and homelessness also disproportionately impact students of color as compared to their white peers. In 2020 alone the gap between Black and white students when it came to basic needs insecurity was 16 percentage points.⁶ By creating anti-hunger programs on public college and university and community college campuses, students experiencing multiple facets of insecurity and historically underserved populations will be able to address their food insecurity quickly and conveniently.

Data from Massachusetts surveys are similar to national statistics on food and housing insecurity and homelessness among college students, with increased need found among community college students.⁷ College students are also limited in their ability to access federal assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Despite efforts from advocacy groups to expand SNAP eligibility, students attending college at least half-time are unqualified unless they fall into a limited category of exemptions, including working at least 20 hours per week or being a parent or caregiver.⁸ Current federal SNAP requirements allow for only about 18% of college students to be eligible, and only 3% of students currently receive benefits.⁹ National studies have also revealed the multifaceted impact food insecurity can have on students, with students experiencing food insecurity having significantly higher odds of facing poor quality of sleep, higher stress, disordered eating, and lower GPAs compared to food secure students.¹⁰

² *Id.*

³ “2019 #REALCOLLEGE Survey Results: Report for Massachusetts Public Higher Education System.” *The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University*, June 2020, <https://www.mass.edu/strategic/documents/2019%20HOPE%20Center%20MA%20Report.pdf>. Accessed 15 September 2021.

⁴ Wisconsin Hope Lab and Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, *supra* note 1.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ “#REALCOLLEGE 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic.” *The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice*, 31 March 2021, <https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/RCReport2021.pdf>. Accessed 16 September 2021.

⁷ “#REALCOLLEGE 2020: Five Years of Evidence on Campus Basic Needs Security.” *The Hope Center for Colleges, Community, and Justice*, February 2020, https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2019_RealCollege_Survey_Report.pdf. Accessed 16 September 2021.

⁸ Garratt, Robyn. “Reexamining SNAP Policies for College Students.” *Community Commons*, The Institute for People, Place, and Possibility, <https://www.communitycommons.org/collections/Reexamining-SNAP-Policies-for-College-Students>. Accessed 16 September 2021.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Zein, Aseel El, et. al. “Prevalence and Correlates of Food Insecurity Among College Students: A Multi-Institutional Study.” *BMC Public Health*, vol. 19, number 660, 29 May 2019, <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-019-6943-6>. Accessed 16 September 2021.

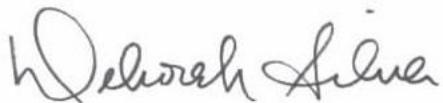
The legislation before the Committee would direct the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education to establish a Hunger-Free Campus Program office. This office would be responsible for designating a public higher education institution as a “Hunger-Free Campus” and then assisting the institution in applying for Hunger-Free Campus grants to support the implementation of anti-hunger initiatives. These initiatives may include the creation and support of:

- student meal credit sharing programs;
- campus food pantries;
- campus basic needs emergency funds;
- one or more staff positions to assist food insecure students; and/or
- campus-wide surveys to assess study-body food insecurity.

To qualify for these grants, colleges and universities have to fulfill several requirements to be identified as Hunger-Free Campuses. These requirements include designating a Hunger-Free Campus coordinator, establishing a Hunger-Free Campus Task Force, annually assessing the food needs of their students, and identifying students that are potentially eligible for federal food assistance programs. H.1368 and S.822 allow college students to innovatively design on-campus anti-hunger initiatives that address food insecurity for themselves and their peers. By allowing specificity and flexibility in the creation of anti-hunger initiatives and incorporating the requirement of student participation in the Hunger-Free Task Force, campuses can more effectively and accurately respond to student needs. The bill also aims to measure the success of this program by requiring the Department of Higher Education to submit an annual report reviewing the activities resulting from the Hunger-Free Campus program, such as student participation and outcome of each campus initiative.

College, university, and community college students go to great lengths to pursue higher education and the opportunities this pursuit can unlock. These students deserve campus-coordinated support to address their food needs and help them achieve their educational goals. Both H.1368 and S.822 will enable public colleges and universities and community colleges to provide this much needed support. **For all of these reasons, Massachusetts Appleseed strongly urges you to issue a favorable report for H.1368/S.822, *An Act establishing the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative.***

Respectfully submitted,



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