



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

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S-3097 – Food Insecurity

November 29, 2017

S-3097 – Food Insecurity; S-3097 would allow students to voluntarily donate unused meal funds to be distributed to the New Jersey Federation of Food Banks.

http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2016/Bills/S3500/3097_I1.HTM

After hearing input from NJASCU, the bill's sponsor Senator Teresa Ruiz (D-29) agreed to remove S-3097 from consideration by the Senate Higher Education Committee on Thursday, November 30, 2017. NJASCU institutions are greatly appreciative of Senator Ruiz's responsiveness to the college and university administrators, who, while understanding the sentiment behind the legislation, have real concerns about the implementation as detailed below.

The NJ Association of State Colleges and Universities (NJASCU) has some serious concerns about the implementation and effectiveness of this bill. We very much appreciate the Senator's concern regarding food insecurity on campus but unfortunately this bill will have unintended consequences which we must bring to your attention.

- All food service on our campuses is contracted out to third party vendors. When vendors enter into a contract for food services, they take into consideration something called the "missed meal factor" which is part of the entire pricing scheme. It is very similar to how a gym factors usage into the monthly membership fee. For example, there is an assumption that not every person will use the gym every day and even if they do, they will not use the same services that everyone else uses at the same time. In the same way, the vendor contracts are based in part on the assumption that not every student will eat every meal to which they are entitled under their meal plan. If this bill were to become law during the term of a contract, it would change the terms and conditions of that contract. Moreover, even if the bill were to be implemented for future contracts, the vendors will most certainly factor in the additional costs of these donations and will increase the price of the contract, which will increase the price of the meal plans for students. This will likely price

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*The College of New Jersey
Kean University
Montclair State University*

*New Jersey City University
Ramapo College of New Jersey
Rowan University*

*Stockton University
Thomas Edison State University
William Paterson University*

some students out of the meal plan, which provides regular access to healthy meals, and could very well have the unintended consequence of increasing food insecurity on campus, rather than abating it.

- The bill directs that the funds be provided to the NJ Federation of Food Banks for distribution in its network. Many of our schools, including Rowan University, Montclair State University, William Paterson University and Ramapo College have established food pantries on their campuses. To the best of my knowledge, none of these pantries is part of the Federation, and therefore would not be the beneficiaries of these donations. It appears from the Federation's website that there are six locations throughout the state, and most of them are not near any of our institutions. While I am sure that the Federation does good work, and provides much needed services, it is unlikely that any of our students would travel to a food bank, when they can walk across campus and utilize the college's food pantry. Also, those schools with food pantries generally have made accommodations for food insecurity situations. For example, Stockton University has a program that provides students with resources and access to additional community services, which stand to benefit them in the long-term. The program offers immediate assistance in the form of meal vouchers, which are redeemable for breakfast, lunch or dinner at the Student Restaurant.
- If a student's room and board is paid for by federal financial aid and loans, we are unsure that they have the authority to make that type of donation.
- In similar circumstances when students make a donation of any sort on campus, the students or their parents have requested a receipt for tax purposes. Since third party vendors manage the food services, we will not be able to provide the requested receipt, which will then cause confusion and potential resentment on behalf of the donors.
- Most meal plans are purchased for an academic year, so any meals not used by the student roll over from the fall semester into the spring semester. Allowing a donation at the end of the fall semester would effectively reduce the meal plan value for the student in the spring semester.

Food insecurity for students is a complex issue which can have many causes. The state colleges and universities are aware of the problem and are taking steps on campus to address it. While we understand this bill has the best of intentions, we cannot support it in its current form.