



**Connecticut State  
Colleges & Universities**

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Mark E. Ojakian  
*President*

July 24, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

I write to express my grave concern with the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposed changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The draft rule announced yesterday, which prohibits states from automatically deeming those receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits eligible for SNAP, is expected to disqualify more than 3 million low-income individuals across the nation from receiving food assistance.

The Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system consists of 17 institutions of higher learning, including 12 community colleges, four state universities, and one online degree-granting college. We serve more than 85,000 students on an annual basis.

Our student bodies are reflective of the diversity and inclusion that make Connecticut strong. People of all ages, races, and socioeconomic statuses choose to pursue their educational goals at CSCU institutions. One area that all of our students have in common is a shared desire to improve the trajectory of their lives for themselves, their families, and their communities.

The unfortunate reality is that food insecurity is a large and growing problem on CSCU campuses. At our community colleges in particular, many of our students are the first in their family to attend college, most work one or more jobs while attending classes, and a large number have children of their own. Nearly half of our community college students are eligible for full Pell grant funding to cover the cost of their education. The obstacles they face are many. Lack of housing, transportation, childcare, and, perhaps most importantly, reliable sources of food are all impediments to graduation and, in many cases, the opportunity to find a meaningful career.

The problem is far from Connecticut-specific and is in fact national in scope. The Wisconsin HOPE Lab, in its March 2017 report, *Hungry and Homeless in College*, found that two out of three community college students were food insecure—despite the fact that nearly one third of students experiencing food or housing insecurity were working and receiving financial aid. Put simply, this massive and under-recognized problem will require comprehensive solutions.

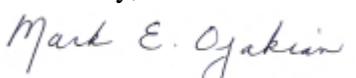
Connecticut has taken important steps to address food insecurity on campus. We recognize as a state that students experiencing hunger are less likely to succeed in the classroom. In order to help remedy the problem, CSCU currently hosts food pantries on each campus – many of which

struggle to keep up with demand. Our elected officials have also recognized the problem. In the most recent legislative session, the General Assembly passed and Governor Ned Lamont signed legislation to study the scope and effect of food insecurity on college campuses. Moreover, members of our federal delegation, Sen. Chris Murphy and Rep. Jahana Hayes, have introduced the Closing the College Hunger Gap Act to tackle the problem head on. At the same time, many of our students rely heavily on SNAP benefits as a primary means of sustenance. It is a critical program that helps our most vulnerable students to pursue a college degree or certificate – often leading to employment in high demand fields.

While we continue to study the impact of the potential rule change, initial projections show that it could cause dozens or hundreds of CSCU students to lose SNAP benefits. In short, USDA's proposed rule would only serve to put additional burdens on the shoulders of Connecticut's students – while making no meaningful reductions to the federal budget deficit.

I implore you to reverse this shortsighted decision.

Sincerely,



Mark Ojakian, President  
Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

cc: Gov. Ned Lamont  
Sen. Richard Blumenthal  
Sen. Chris Murphy  
Rep. John Larson  
Rep. Joe Courtney  
Rep. Rosa DeLauro  
Rep. Jim Himes  
Rep. Jahana Hayes