

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017

**Sens. Warren, Markey, Murray and Stabenow Request GAO Study on Food Insecurity at American Colleges and Universities**

**Washington, D.C.** - U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Senator Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), Ranking Member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Patty Murray (D-Wash.), and Ranking Member of the Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) today asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study on food insecurity at American colleges and universities.

"Sacrificing food for education can undermine a student's educational goals and create barriers on their path to obtaining a certificate, degree, or credential," **the senators wrote in their letter to the GAO.** "This situation raises concern and deserves greater scrutiny."

The senators cite recent anecdotal studies indicating that a large number of American college students experience food insecurity - including roughly half of community college students - and note that many higher education institutions have implemented programs on their campuses to help prevent students from going hungry.

The letter asks the GAO to examine the extent of food insecurity at the nation's colleges and universities; barriers to addressing food insecurity among college students; existing local, state and federal programs to assist low-income college students experiencing food insecurity, their effectiveness, and potential improvements that can be made to these programs; and examples of the best practices and strategies already being used to mitigate the problem at colleges and universities.

In Massachusetts, 13 community colleges, several state colleges, and multiple University of Massachusetts campuses operate food pantries on campus or have formal partnerships with local food pantries to help feed students affected by campus hunger.

"The prevalence of food insecurity on our campus, and on campuses across the state, is a huge concern. For some of our students, it is a daily struggle to decide whether to spend their last dollars on food or on the subway to get to class," **said Dr. Pam Eddinger, President of Bunker Hill Community College**, which hosts a mobile food pantry every month. "We need to do more to ensure that our students' basic needs are met so that they can focus on completing their degrees and working towards a better future."

A copy of the senators' letter to the GAO is attached.

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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 22, 2017

Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Recent studies indicate that many individuals working to advance their education at our nation's colleges and universities are struggling with food insecurity or lack the resources to obtain nutritional food. A survey of more than 4,000 students from 10 community colleges found that roughly half of all respondents struggled with food insecurity and 22 percent of respondents had to cut the size of their meals or skip meals entirely due to a lack of money for food.<sup>1</sup> Another study conducted across 26 four-year colleges and universities and eight community colleges found strikingly similar results, even among students who are employed, participating in a campus meal plan, or receiving other financial aid or material help.<sup>2</sup>

Consistent with these findings, many institutions and systems of higher education have individually studied food insecurity on their own campuses, and have taken action to help prevent their students from going hungry, such as creating food banks for their students and directing them to other local, state, and federal nutrition programs.<sup>3</sup> Today, there are 450 member institutions of the College and University Food Bank Alliance, the majority of which operate on-campus programs that feed students experiencing food insecurity, as well as many off-campus programs working to fill this urgent need.<sup>4</sup>

Sacrificing food for education can undermine a student's educational goals and create barriers on their path to obtaining a certificate, degree, or credential. This situation raises concern and deserves greater scrutiny. We are writing to request a report on the issue of food insecurity among students seeking education beyond high school. Specifically, we ask that GAO provide a comprehensive assessment of the problem, including:

- The extent of food insecurity among students at our nation's colleges and universities;

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<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin Hope Lab, *Hungry to Learn: Addressing Food & Housing Insecurity Among Undergraduates*, December 2015. See [www.wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin\\_hope\\_lab\\_hungry\\_to\\_learn.pdf](http://www.wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin_hope_lab_hungry_to_learn.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> National Student Campaign Against Hunger & Homelessness, *Hunger On Campus: The Challenge of Food Insecurity for College Students*, October 2016. <http://studentsagainsthunger.org/hunger-on-campus/>.

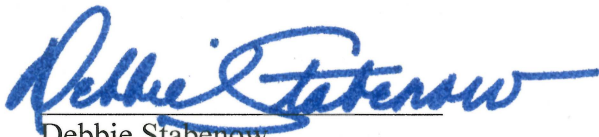
<sup>3</sup> American Council on Education, *Fighting Food Insecurity on Campus*, June 2015. <https://higheredtoday.org/2015/06/29/fighting-food-insecurity-on-campus/>.

<sup>4</sup> College and University Food Bank Alliance. *CUFBA Hits 400 Members*. December 2016. <http://www.cufba.org/member-info/>.

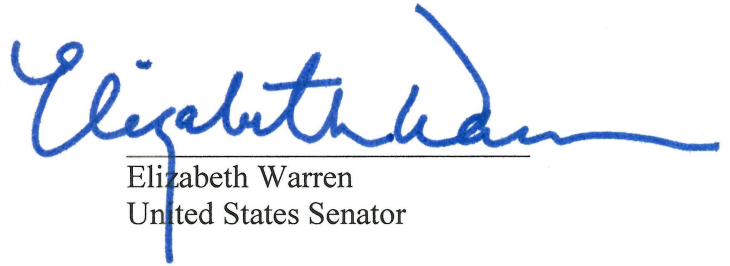
- Barriers to addressing food insecurity among college students that currently exist at the local, state, or federal level;
- Existing local, state, and federal programs or benefits currently assisting low-income college students experiencing food insecurity, how effective these programs are at reaching these students, and how these programs could more effectively accomplish the goal of reducing food insecurity among college students; and
- Examples of best practices and strategies already underway at colleges and universities to help address student hunger or improve students' access to existing programs.

Thank you for your attention to this request. We look forward to hearing from you.

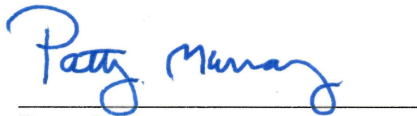
Sincerely,



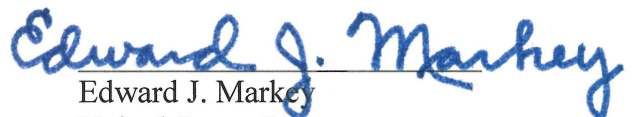
Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator