



July 30, 2019

The Honorable Al Lawson, Jr.
United States House of Representatives
1406 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Lawson,

On behalf of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), I am writing in support of the *College Student Hunger Act of 2019* (H.R. 3809), introduced on July 17, 2019. For over five decades, CGS has served as the national organization dedicated to advancing graduate education and research. Our membership includes nearly 500 institutions of higher education in the United States, Canada, and abroad. Collectively, our members grant 87 percent of all U.S. doctorates and the majority of U.S. master's degrees. CGS commends your effort to address the issue of student hunger on college and university campuses.

Food insecurity of college students is an area of growing concern. As a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report shows, upwards of 30 percent of college students have reported struggles with obtaining enough to eat.¹ This could have a significant impact on their ability to continue their education and pose a barrier to completing their degrees, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Many institutions of higher education have made a concerted effort to respond, including setting up food pantries and meal donations. However, it is critical for federal policies to address this issue, which H.R. 3809 aims to do.

The legislation would expand eligibility requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to include Pell Grant-eligible and certain independent students, as well as those who have an expected family contribution of zero. It would increase awareness of eligibility and outreach to eligible students, making it easier for them to receive SNAP. According to the GAO report, nearly 2 million food insecure college students are currently SNAP eligible but are not accessing these benefits.¹

CGS applauds your efforts to respond to this issue and encourages you to consider additional graduate students who may be eligible for SNAP but are not currently captured in the bill. While a portion of graduate students would fall under the definition H.R. 3809 uses for "independent student"—including student veterans and those with legal dependents other than a spouse—we believe that by excluding the section of the definition under the *Higher Education Act* which refers explicitly to "graduate and professional students," the legislation leaves out a segment of graduate students that may otherwise be eligible for the expanded assistance.

The number of low-income students in graduate school is growing. In 2014, 48 percent of master's students and 45 percent of doctoral students reported a family income of less than

¹ Government Accountability Office. Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits, [GAO-19-95](#) (Washington, D.C.: January 9, 2019).

\$32,000.² At the same time, more former Pell recipients are pursuing graduate education, with a significant proportion remaining Pell-eligible.³ With this in mind, we urge you to consider the unique needs of graduate students and encourage you to adjust the definition of “independent student” to increase eligibility for a broader range of students in graduate degree programs who may also be struggling with food insecurity.

Once again, we sincerely appreciate your commitment to this critical issue and look forward to working with you on ways to provide more assistance to students most in need. If we can be a resource to you or your staff, please contact CGS’s Vice President of Public Policy and Government Affairs, Lauren Inouye, at Linouye@cgs.nche.edu or (202)-461-3864.

Sincerely,



Suzanne T. Ortega
President

CC: The Honorable James McGovern
The Honorable Alcee Hastings
The Honorable Gwen Moore
The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton
The Honorable Rashida Tlaib
The Honorable Salud Carbajal
The Honorable Earl Blumenauer
The Honorable Darren Soto

² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *Table 1.1-B Percentage distribution of graduate students, by graduate degree program and selected student characteristics: 2015-16*. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019469.pdf>.

³ Okahana, H. (2018). Data sources: increasing number of graduate and professional students are former Pell recipients. Retrieved from: <https://cgsnet.org/data-sources-increasing-number-graduate-and-professional-students-are-former-pell-recipients-0>