

James Speaker

Testimony

Hello, thank you all for having me today. My name is James Speaker, the current President of The United Students Government at SUNY Buffalo State College here in Buffalo, New York. I proudly represent a diverse campus of achieved students, faculty, and staff; all representing a variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Earlier this semester, I was made aware of Senate Bill S1151B, The Hunger Free Campus Act. Upon researching the bill, I realized that this bill would provide an incredibly important amount of support for students of higher education across New York State, providing their campuses with the long-overdue, necessary resources to combat food insecurity.

Here at SUNY Buffalo State College, efforts are made to combat the food insecurity and financial challenges that some of our students face. Dining locations provide students facing financial challenges food at appropriate times, and Buffalo State maintains its own food pantry, Milligan's Food Pantry.

A complete look across the SUNY system, however, and it is clear that current legislation to combat food insecurity on college campuses is inadequate. Bill S1151B provides the long-overdue investment into the basic needs of our students, ensuring that campuses have the resources to properly feed students of need; allowing them to learn and participate in school at an equal level to their peers.

Bill S1151B should not be a question of “why” or “how much”. As the Student Government President of a College located in a city with a poverty rate of 30.1% per recent Census data, I view it as vital that any possible investment into the social safety nets of our young students are made, particularly as young students continue to face an onslaught of issues brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a Republican and fiscal conservative at heart, I surely understand why some may be opposed to this Bill. Investments in higher education and SUNY, without a doubt, make up a large portion of New York State’s financial burden. But for those hesitant, I ask you to turn no further than Former California Governor Ronald Reagan, who said in a 1967 address at California State University at Chico, “*We are a compassionate people. I believe we should keep, forever, our tradition of building a floor beneath which no human being should live in degradation.*”

Now, more than ever, New York State must act to make an investment into the basic needs of our students. Facing a changing world and unprecedented pandemic, students across New York State who face food insecurity are dealing with perhaps the most challenging time in their lives. With Bill S1151B, New York State gives honor to the figures of Liberty and Justice who are present on our seal, and continues to further invest into the idea that the Empire State is one where students, of all walks of life, are given the chance to pursue a life of *Excelsior*; ever upward, as they continue to grow as productive members of our society and State. As leaders on the community and state level, we must accept this responsibility, and Bill S1151B is our moment to do so.

