



December 18, 2023

The Hon. Joanne M. Comerford, Chair
The Hon. David M. Rogers, Chair
Joint Committee on Higher Education
State House
Boston, MA 02133

Re:

- **S.835/H.1293, the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative**
- **S.816/H.1260, The CHERISH Act**

Dear Chair Comerford and Chair Rogers:

I am writing on behalf of One Family, Inc., to provide written testimony in support of the bills referenced above.

Background - One Family

One Family, Inc. (onefamilyinc.org) was established in 2000, with a mission to prevent homelessness and break the cycle of family poverty in Massachusetts, by promoting pathways to economic independence through advocacy, education, and innovation. We currently serve about 500 families across Massachusetts through three direct service programs - One Family Scholars, Credential to Career Coaching, and Family Self-Sufficiency. The underlying philosophy of all three programs is that long-term housing stability is built on a foundation of education and career success. Through each, we help parents with low incomes throughout Massachusetts identify and pursue education and career goals, and increase their income to achieve economic independence and housing stability.

In addition to our direct service work, we also help state agencies and nonprofit organizations incorporate coaching focused on education and career pathways into their housing and asset-building programs. Finally, [we advocate for policies](#) that support housing stability and economic opportunity; importantly, we engage the families we serve in that advocacy.

S.835/H.1293, the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative

Widespread hunger among Massachusetts college students is well-documented. In 2019 The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University conducted a survey of 9,978 students attending colleges and universities in the Massachusetts public higher education system. Of those students, 37% experienced food insecurity in the prior 30 days. One in four students reported going hungry because they didn't have enough money for food, and nearly one in three (32%) reported skipping meals or eating smaller meals because they couldn't afford all the food they needed.¹

Hunger is particularly prevalent among student-parents – who represent a quarter of all U.S. college students² – and their children. A Hope Center survey of nearly 200,000 students across the U.S. conducted during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic found that about half (47%) of all college students with children were experiencing food insecurity, vs. 31% of non-parenting

¹ The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University, "2019 #Realcollege Survey Results – Report for Massachusetts Public Higher Education System" (2020), <https://www.mass.edu/strategic/documents/2019%20HOPE%20Center%20MA%20Report.pdf>.

² Institute for Women's Policy Research, Fact Sheet #C424, "4.8 Million College Students are Raising Children" (2014), https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/C424_Student-Parents_final-1.pdf.

college students.³ At schools with on-campus housing, student-parents are less likely to live on-campus than non-parenting students, which may reduce access to food sources such as food pantries, dining halls and on-campus markets.

Take, for example, V■■■■, a One Family Scholar and single parent of one child, who earned her associate degree at Middlesex Community College, and is working towards her bachelor's degree in Social Work at Salem State University:

When I was a student at Middlesex Community College, my son and I experienced food insecurity from time to time. MCC did have a food pantry, but I didn't know how to cook the foods they had and make good meals, so I didn't get food from the pantry too often. Being a mother who wasn't always able to put enough food on the table for my son and myself took a toll on both of us. It was hard to focus on schoolwork when I didn't know where our next meal was coming from. If MCC had food supports for my son and me above and beyond a food pantry, it would have made a huge difference in our lives, and I would have been able to focus more on my schoolwork and earning my associate degree.

Or take W■■■■, a graduate of Lesley University and the One Family Scholars program. W■■■■ reports that the only reason why she and her son didn't go hungry while she was at Lesley is because her son has a disability, and their social worker told her about SNAP/food stamps and WIC food assistance for families with children under the age of five, and helped her apply. Struggling student-parents who *don't* have a guide who can point the way to accessing food support are often unable to put enough food on the table for their children and themselves.

Recognizing the need to address campus hunger, in 2021, the Legislature allocated \$3.7M for initiatives addressing hunger on college campuses, and included \$1M in the FY24 state budget for the Hunger-Free Campus Initiative. S.835/H.1293 would build on these investments, by establishing an ongoing Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative, to support efforts such as expanding student enrollment in federal nutrition programs like SNAP and WIC, increasing participation with dining hall meal swipe and meal card programs, and establishing on-campus mini-marts and vendors that accept payment via SNAP EBT cards. **One Family urges the Committee to report this legislation favorably, and to strengthen it by adding language to the effect that, in order to be designated a hunger-free campus, a college must take into consideration the particular needs of student-parents and their children in designing and implementing measures to eliminate hunger.**

S.816/H.1260, The CHERISH Act

The CHERISH Act (An Act **C**ommitting to **H**igher **E**ducation the **R**esources to **I**nsure a **S**trong and **H**ealthy Public Higher Education System) seeks to reverse a 30% reduction in the Commonwealth's investment in public higher education in real dollars since 2001.

Highlights of this legislation include:

- Establishing fair and adequate minimum funding levels for public higher education that would be phased in over five years, and prohibiting tuition and fee increases during this implementation as long as the state's funding commitment is met.
- Enabling students to graduate from public higher education debt-free, initially beginning with debt-free community college.
- Investing \$2,000 per high-need student in enhanced student support services, expanding the proven SUCCESS program to all of public higher education.

³Testimony of Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab for the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Rules (9/8/2021), https://rules.house.gov/sites/republicans.rules118.house.gov/files/HRDT-117-RU00-WState-GoldrickRab-20210908_0.pdf.

The approach that the CHERISH Act would put in place mirrors key aspects of One Family's longest-running direct service program, [One Family Scholars](#). Through this initiative, One Family provides individualized academic and career coaching to single parents with low incomes attending college in Massachusetts. One Family Scholars receive scholarships to cover direct costs of college, including fees, books, and technology. They also receive a monthly stipend to supplement employment income, which helps Scholars meet expenses such as childcare and transportation, so they can make steady progress towards a college degree.

This combination of individualized coaching, scholarships and monthly stipends helps One Family Scholars achieve remarkable results, year after year. Nationally, less than 10% of single parents who enroll in college earn a degree.⁴ In contrast, 75% of One Family Scholars - all of whom are low-income single parents - graduate from college with a degree.

The CHERISH Act would utilize some of these same approaches - robust financial aid and academic support - on a broad scale, which would help make it possible for historically disadvantaged and underrepresented students to both access a college degree, and persist through graduation. It would build on critical investments already put in place by the Legislature and the Healey Administration, such as MASSGrant Plus Expansion, MassReconnect and SUCCESS grants. **One Family strongly endorses the CHERISH Act and the increased investment in public higher education that this legislation seeks to spur.**

Thank you for your leadership and advocacy, and for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of S.835/H.1293, the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative, and S.816/H.1260, The CHERISH Act.

Sincerely,



Valerie Paric
Executive Director

cc: Representative Mindy Domb, Representative Patricia Duffy, Representative Sean Garballey, Senator Joan Lovely, Representative Andres Vargas

⁴ Galt, Milli and Cruse, "Investing in Single Mothers' Education," (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2018), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED612662.pdf>.