

Roundtable Examining Hunger on College Campuses ([link](#))

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Thank you for your invitation to participate in today's roundtable discussion. I'm honored to be here with you and to call in the generations of students who have previously, are currently, and who will experience basic needs challenges across food, housing, health, transportation, dependent care, etc.. We also call in our communities who have dedicated and those still dedicating some or all of their time to supporting students' basic needs. This is a multigenerational journey that we are honored to serve as bridges, organizers, and alchemists of possibilities with you today.

Chairman McGovern recently visited both our UC Berkeley campus and the Berkeley Food Network. I had the honor of attending both sessions and learned from the powerful stories and efforts happening in our Bay Area, State, and across the country. I was left in awe and energized knowing that we are not alone in believing and contributing every day to the basic needs of our communities. Within a matter of days we learned about the formal letter signed by the 25 Chairs of House Committees encouraging President Biden to convene a national conference to vision and design a roadmap to end hunger in America by 2030. Immediately after, I received the invitation to join today's roundtable.

I share the journey to my participation today to frame the depth of my awe. The abundance that has flowed leading up to today is unheard of:

When I was in Calexico High School, despite being part of federal and state funded programs like TRiO, AVID, and Mock Trial ... despite being part of the chosen few in AP courses ... despite being heavily involved in leadership roles - no one ever spoke to us - much less - trained us to understand and navigate our basic needs into and through college. At best, we were told about application requirements, applying for FAFSA, and some factors to consider in making our decision of where to attend college. No one ever spoke or prepared us for what to do, how to navigate, and succeed in college - only how to get there.

When I received a full ride scholarship to attend UC Berkeley, I was told that I didn't have anything to worry about because of my full ride scholarship. Then I got there and I learned that I wouldn't be allowed to work because of my full ride scholarship, despite the scholarship not providing enough funding to cover my basic needs year round - much less support my family the way I had earned the honor of doing so. When I asked college counselors, state and federal campus programs, and equity support services about support with basic needs - they would each share that I wasn't alone in my struggles. Many had experienced the same challenges 5, 10, and 20 years ago when they were in college. In their effort to norm and affirm me that I wasn't alone, I was only further heartbroken that so many of us were struggling to eat, remain safely housed, care for our health, and there were no organized or coordinated efforts to support us. We had no idea that all of our challenges would get even worse through the 2008-2009 recession and the 82% UC tuition increase as a result of less funding directed to our UC system from federal and state budgets.

We speak so much about higher education being the great social equalizer in our country. I guess, in its literal sense, my college experience was equal in that I was expected to attend and perform through the rigorous academic landscapes of UC Berkeley just like all my peers. Never did a professor in any of my undergraduate or graduate courses provide an equitable quantity or rigor of reading, assignments, midterms, or finals to adjust for the fact that some of us had to work multiple jobs and had responsibilities beyond our academics... and others... did not. I had peers who were generationally wealthy, legacy students, and other intersectional privileges where they could solely focus on their

academics. To this day I haven't heard of a college or university across the country that has an equity centered academic policy to honor the health, wellbeing, and capacity of students through their undergraduate and graduate degree completion.

Today, the total cost of attendance, which includes both tuition and cost of living, are more expensive than ever before. Not only are things more expensive, students are having to navigate college through ongoing environmental catastrophes, compound pandemics, extreme political swings that impact budgets and decision-making, and no navigational training or preparation prior to entering college.

Thankfully, we've been in an emergent community organizing journey since I graduated. Today, at UC Berkeley our Chancellor actively names basic needs as a priority, our new Vice Chancellor of Equity & Inclusion actively shares about her lived experiences & commitments to improving basic needs, and all new admits and continuing students are welcomed with information and invitations to our UC Berkeley Basic Needs Center. This is not just at UC Berkeley, all 10 UC campuses have an institutionalized basic needs committee, we have a UC Systemwide Basic Needs Committee that coordinates research, prevention services, sustainability, and advocacy with all 10 campuses, all student elected and organizing entities are organized to improve student basic needs, we've built infrastructure for basic needs and health equity efforts at the UC Office of the President, and we have a very proactive UC Regents Board dedicated to improving student basic needs. Beyond UC, we created the California Higher Education Basic Needs Alliance (CHEBNA) to unite and coordinate basic needs efforts across the public higher education segments of California: California Community Colleges, California State University, and University of California. Our UC and CHEBNA efforts have earned us trust-centered relationships with state departments and committees, state associations, and state coalitions dedicated to improving basic needs of all people, including college students. Through this emergent journey, we have learned with great detail timely solutions and possibilities that can move us towards ending hunger in America:

- **Name College Students**
 - Name college students amongst our federal priority populations alongside children, single parents, disabled, veterans, and elderly community members.
 - College students have intersectional identities, they are single parents, disabled, veterans, elderly, and/or have dependents that are children or elders.
- **Design for College Students**
 - Design college student policies, protocols, and cultures across all federal departments.
 - We cannot only name college students as a priority population in the existing systemic and institutional landscape.
 - We must be intentional about advancing our current systems and institutions towards serving college students with a sense of belonging, equity, effectiveness, and accountability.
 - We already have solutions to existing challenges and even more possibilities will be generated by finally naming & designing for college students as a priority population for all federal departments.
 - Additionally, college students, especially our first-generation college students, are the ones assisting and translating federal programs and processes for our families.
- **Prevent Systemic Crises**
 - As we name and design college students into our federal ecosystem we must also do everything possible to prevent students experiencing challenges that need crisis interventions.

- We can prevent students from experiencing basic needs challenges by ensuring that students can cover their cost of attendance. Beyond tuition, the cost of living is the true debt generator. Doubling the Pell Grant for undergraduate students will move us in that direction.
- We need to understand and commit to our graduate and professional school students who will not benefit from Doubling the Pell Grant. We must ensure that they can also cover their cost of attendance, especially given their more challenging landscape of starting with higher levels of debt and having less financial aid to fund their graduate/professional degrees.
- **Organize for belonging, equity, and justice**
 - As we energize the healthiest and best journey ahead, we must organize.
 - Organize our data, tracking, and reporting. We need a student basic needs assessment at the start, midpoint, and end of year to track the non-linear basic needs experiences of our students. This data will inform effective practices to share out, equity centered decision-making for resources, policy-making, and implementation.
 - Organize these and future roundtables and hearings to connect participants, efforts, and possibilities to make progress according to capacity rather than wait for everything to be ready.
 - Organize the journey towards, success of, and strategy beyond the upcoming White-House Conference to End Hunger in America. We are ready and energized to contribute to the planning, facilitation, and implementation of agreements reached at the White-House Conference.

We are not interested in placing college students in a hierarchy of human value over the rest of our communities. Rather, we understand the many transformative ways that taking care of college students will allow them to go off and take care of communities they will live in, work with, and lead. We thank you for your invitation to today's conversation and to the efforts ahead that will end hunger in America.

I leave you with what became a guiding compass for me through our compound pandemic times, an offering from Octavia Butler:

“God is Change,
 And in the end,
 God prevails.
 But meanwhile...
 Kindness eases Change.
 Love quiets fear.
 And a sweet and powerful
 Positive obsession
 Blunts pain,
 Diverts rage,
 And engages each of us
 In the greatest,
 The most intense
 Of our chosen struggles.”

May our positive obsession be ending hunger in America and may our chosen struggle be to end hunger in America with values of belonging, equity, pleasure, and justice.