



## *News Release*

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### **State Officials Discuss New State Report on Material Hardships Faced by College Students in the Garden State**

**PARAMUS, NJ-** Today, Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis and Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson joined representatives from the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice to release a report on basic needs challenges faced by New Jersey college students. Seventeen county colleges participated in this year's #RealCollege Survey, which reveals students' experiences with food, housing, and other insecurities related to students' basic needs.

These results will inform the next phase of work to make college more affordable in New Jersey, recognizing that a college education not only includes school tuition and fees, but also the costs of basic needs like food, housing, and childcare. These eye-opening statistics allow institutional leaders and policymakers to have a true understanding of the full costs faced by today's students to bolster efforts to support students holistically. Following the presentation of the survey results, national experts discussed national trends and best practices to address material hardships.

"Higher education remains out of reach for too many New Jersey residents. I am committed to expanding access and helping our students succeed through programs like tuition-free community college and the expansion of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). By addressing these obstacles, we will continue building a stronger and fairer New Jersey for all," **said Governor Phil Murphy.**

"We are working diligently to identify and address the material hardships students face as they work hard to obtain a credential. We know that there is more work to be done to support our students and the #RealCollege survey helps us to begin to understand the true needs and costs for college student so that we can continue to tackle this critical issue," **said Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis.** "We have already begun to partner with county colleges to address material hardships through the grants for wraparound services provided through the Community College Opportunity Grant Program and look forward to soon announcing the awardees of the Hunger Free Campus Act Grant Program. These steps build on our partnership with NJ DHS and Commissioner Johnson to inform institutional administrators about social services available to students more broadly. We recognize that college affordability is a multi-faceted challenge and are using every tool in our toolbox to support student success."

"For many students, college affordability means much more than tuition. It means having affordable health care, child care, nutrition and other life-sustaining services that make it possible to study and succeed," **said Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson.** "In the Murphy Administration, we know that these supports are important to students continuing in school and graduating. That's why we have made it easier for community college students to access our NJ SNAP food assistance program, made nearly \$100 million in new investments in

affordable child care across the State, and continue fighting to protect the affordable health care gains made possible by the Affordable Care Act. We're invested in students' success and that means we're invested in our students and their families' health and well-being."

"New Jersey's community colleges have long been concerned that too many community college students struggle to find food and a place to live. We are grateful that the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and the Hope Center have quantified the extent of those struggles," said **Dr. Aaron Fichtner, President, New Jersey Council of County Colleges**. "The findings in the #RealCollege Survey Report will inform our current and future efforts to work with state government, community-based organizations and others to expand partnerships and strengthen programs to address the food and housing needs of students. Such efforts are critical to ensuring that more New Jerseyans can earn credentials, certificates, and degrees, and obtain jobs and careers that provide family-sustaining wages and contribute to the state's economy."

"For many students, the struggle to afford college doesn't end when the tuition bill gets paid," said **Bergen Community College Interim President Dr. Tony Ross**. "In fact, for many community college students – an especially vulnerable population – they often make a choice between paying their tuition and having access to food, shelter or other basic necessities of life. As community college leaders, we must take proactive measures to target these obstacles as we seek to support our students both in- and outside the classroom."

"It is clear that college is now about serious financial struggles, not partying. Money weighs heavily on students' minds, and without a safe place to sleep and enough to eat they cannot concentrate on learning," said **Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, founding director of the Hope Center** and the leading expert on basic needs insecurity among college students. "This is a waste of talent and it undermines our economy. To become student-ready, colleges need to move beyond food pantries and take preventative measures, and policymakers must support them. There are six pieces of federal legislation to address these issues pending in Congress now—it is time to act!"

To view the full report, visit the Hope Center website at: <https://hope4college.com/new-jersey-community-colleges-realcollege-survey-report/>.

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