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First Lady Frances Wolf Convenes College Hunger Roundtable, Engages with Students and Leaders on Resources and Potential Solutions

Harrisburg, PA – First Lady Frances Wolf today hosted a roundtable discussion with Education Secretary Pedro Rivera, Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller, higher education professionals, students, and anti-hunger advocates to discuss ways to address hunger and food insecurity on college campuses.

“Pursuing higher education should not be a privilege reserved for individuals with disposable incomes, and hunger shouldn’t be what holds someone back from succeeding in higher education and taking steps to invest in their future,” First Lady Frances Wolf said. “That is why we are committed to doing all we can at the state level to improve the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians, and that is why I have called for today’s conversation.”

A Government Accountability Office report released in January 2019 found that at least one in three college students do not always have enough to eat. Additionally, 71 percent of college students today do not fit the model of a “typical” college student and may be financially independent, work at least part time, enroll in and stay in college at a later age, or have dependent children. These factors, when paired with other challenges students face like cost of tuition, lodging and/or transportation, books, and supplies, can create significant barriers to making ends meet.

“We know that higher education doesn’t just benefit the students themselves – it also benefits our communities and Pennsylvania’s economy for years to come,” said Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller. “We want to ensure students have the supports they need to be successful. Pursuing higher education should not be a privilege reserved for individuals with disposable incomes, and hunger shouldn’t be what holds someone back from succeeding in higher education and taking steps to invest in their future.”

September is National Hunger Action Month. In Pennsylvania, approximately 1.53 million Pennsylvanians experience chronic hunger and food insecurity every day. Food insecurity means not having access to reliable and nutritious meals. Since hunger and health are deeply connected, the effects of inadequate food are profound, including increased risks for chronic

diseases, higher chances of hospitalization, poorer overall health, and increased health care costs. Chronic hunger also affects cognitive function and our ability to learn and retain information.

Governor Tom Wolf [established](#) Pennsylvania's Food Security Partnership in September 2015. The Partnership includes the departments of Aging, Agriculture, Community and Economic Development, Education, Health, and Human Services. The partnership was established to address hunger in Pennsylvania across numerous fronts and coordinate food and nutrition programs and centralize coordination with federal, state, and local partners. As part of this effort, the Food Security Partnership leads the commonwealth's efforts to better respond to issues that exacerbate food insecurity around Pennsylvania. The issue of hunger among college students has been identified as an opportunity for greater coordination and support.

In January 2018, DHS announced a change to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility requirements for community college students. Under the new policy, community college students enrolled at least part-time and in a qualifying career or technical education program under the Carl D. Perkins Vocation and Technical Education Act or a program preparing students for a high-priority occupation may receive SNAP benefits if they otherwise qualify for the program. Examples of high-priority occupations set by the Department of Labor & Industry include jobs in technology, education, health care, human services, law enforcement, and skilled trades. Before the policy change, individuals who were attending school had to meet exemptions such as working more than 20 hours a week, caring for a child under the age of 6, or having a medical barrier to employment in order to qualify for SNAP while attending school.

The roundtable is an opportunity to build on this initial work and identify potential strategies to alleviating hunger among college students.

Find more information on the Governor's Food Security Partnership [here](#).

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