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## **Human Services Secretary Visits Millersville University to Discuss Need to Increase Minimum Wage**

**Millersville, PA** – Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller today toured Millersville University's Campus Cupboard food pantry to learn about food and other basic need assistance programs available to students. Secretary Miller also met with students, faculty, and administrators to discuss challenges and barriers students face every day and potential solutions, including increasing Pennsylvania's minimum wage.

Many college students across Pennsylvania are ineligible for assistance programs but still struggle to meet basic needs. Raising the minimum wage is a tangible solution to alleviate burdens experienced by students and working Pennsylvanians that can be accomplished at the state level.

"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 Sec. Miller. "Investing in higher education and choosing to pursue their education in Pennsylvania is a decision that benefits our commonwealth, and we must meet this investment with an increased minimum wage that helps working Pennsylvanians meet basic needs."

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 such as cost of tuition, lodging and/or transportation, books, and supplies, can create significant barriers to making ends meet.

The commonwealth's current minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour is the lowest allowed by federal law and trails most other states in the nation, including all of our surrounding states. That means Pennsylvanians doing the same job – especially in rural communities – earn less than someone in Ohio, Maryland, and West Virginia.

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 six, or having a medical barrier to employment in order to qualify for SNAP while attending school.

These changes are a step in the right direction, but they are not available to all students. An immediate minimum wage increase would be an action that can make a positive difference for working students around Pennsylvania.

“When a student pursues higher education, they often do so knowing that it will involve significant long-term costs that extend beyond their time in school,” said Sec. Miller. “We need 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 basic needs like food, transportation, and housing shouldn’t be what holds someone back from succeeding in higher education and taking steps to invest in their future. Increasing Pennsylvania’s minimum wage will help students meet these needs as they pursue their education.”

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