College students have a lot of concerns—heavy course loads, jobs and work study, high costs of tuition and student housing, and mounting student loan debt. But for too many students on college campuses around the country, there is an even greater threat to their well-being and academic success: hunger.

A growing body of research shows the increasing prevalence of food insecurity on U.S. college campuses. Most notably:

- The Hope Lab’s 2017 survey of 43,000 students at 66 institutions in 20 states and Washington, D.C. found that 36% of university students and 42% of community college students were food insecure in the 30 days preceding the survey.

- A 2017 survey conducted by California State University found that 42% of its students are food insecure. A 2016 survey done by University of California (UC) Regents found that one in five UC students do not have access to adequate food or nutrition.

- A 2014 University of Oregon survey found that 59% of students at Western Oregon University had recently experienced food insecurity.

While more than 656 food pantries have sprung up on campuses in recent years to provide temporary assistance to hungry students, federal food benefits—particularly the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—remain the most effective and efficient response to hunger among college students.

In January 2019, a new report from the non-partisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that a shocking 39% of all undergraduates in the nation—almost 7.3 million students—are at risk of hunger because of low household income. GAO also found that among low-income students at risk of food insecurity—who are potentially eligible for SNAP—an astounding 57% did not report participating in SNAP in 2016.

SNAP is the cornerstone of all federal nutrition assistance programs, helping nearly 42 million Americans put food on the table in FY2017.
While the response of higher education institutions often consists of charitable donations and building food pantries, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger is focused on creating a robust policy response to this issue.

MAZON has played a leading role in responding to college hunger at the federal and state levels, including:

- MAZON hosted the first-ever Legislative Briefing on College Hunger in America on Capitol Hill in December 2017, and then hosted a second briefing in January 2019 to coincide with the release of the GAO report—marking the first time a federal agency has confirmed the severity of the problem of hunger and food insecurity among college students.

- MAZON supports several federal legislative proposals to address hunger on college campuses, including Rep. Al Lawson’s “College Student Hunger Act” to increase students’ access to SNAP benefits, Rep. Jim Costa’s “Results Through Innovation Act” to bolster federal funding for SNAP employment and training programs, Rep. Danny Davis’ “Fostering Success in Higher Education Act” to better assist homeless and foster youth, and Rep. Judy Chu’s “Campus Hunger Reduction Act” to make colleges eligible for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Community Food Projects grant program.

- In California, MAZON successfully advanced several pieces of legislation to provide new tools to increase students’ access to CalFresh (California’s food stamps program): Assemblymember Weber’s AB 214 and AB 1747, to improve and expand students’ access to CalFresh, and to require California higher education institutions to apply to participate in local food assistance programs, and Assemblymember Limon’s AB 453 to encourage “hunger free campus” designations. Throughout the state, MAZON continues to coordinate various anti-hunger efforts on college campuses and their surrounding communities.

- MAZON spearheads local coalitions in several additional states, including Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, to advance administrative actions that ensure eligible students have access to federal food benefits, particularly SNAP.