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Your Community College

## The shutdown is affecting Hancock students | Kevin G. Walthers

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Kevin Walthers

Contributed

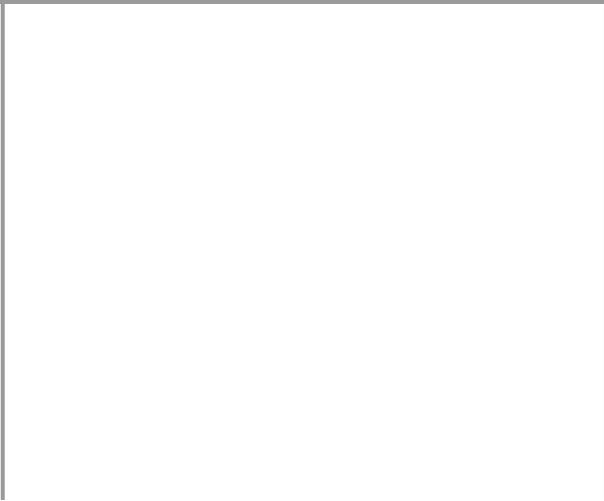


This week, we heard from an Allan Hancock College student who works at Vandenberg Space Force Base and is currently furloughed due to the federal shutdown.

With no income, she expects to fall behind on rent and utilities in November by about \$1,500.

Devastated and uncertain about how to provide for herself, she turned to Hancock's Basic Needs Center for help.

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With swift support from the Allan Hancock College Foundation, she is now receiving the assistance she needs. But as the shutdown stretches on, thousands of California college students will face similar challenges, and we expect more requests like hers in the weeks ahead.

Adding to this hardship, on Nov. 1 Californians are scheduled to lose CalFresh benefits, the state's version of SNAP (formerly known as food stamps). For many students, this is not a bureaucratic inconvenience; it is a direct threat to their ability to eat, stay healthy, and remain enrolled in school.

CalFresh benefits have long been a lifeline for low-income students and their families, helping them afford groceries while juggling classes, jobs, and family responsibilities.

Yet even before the shutdown, the “SNAP gap,” or the difference between those eligible and those actually receiving benefits, was staggering.

Nationally, about one in three college students experience food insecurity, and California is no exception. Cuts to SNAP will only deepen this crisis, forcing students to make impossible choices such as whether to attend class or pick up extra shifts to buy food.

At Hancock, the Basic Needs Center has long served as a hub for connecting students with essential resources. Last year, it launched Bulldog Essentials, the culmination of a decade of investment in our most vulnerable students.

These efforts began with a Rotary-funded emergency loan program for veterans. Over time, the college expanded its support through an emergency fund for all students, greater access to financial aid, the Hancock Promise, bus pass subsidies, and the Food Share Because We Care program, which has since evolved into the Hancock Food Pantry.

Today, Bulldog Essentials has become a vital safety net, showing that community colleges can and must play a central role in addressing hunger in Santa Maria.

What began as a center focused on immediate needs has grown into a comprehensive support network that addresses food insecurity, housing challenges, hygiene, technology access, and emergency financial assistance.

This holistic approach recognizes that hunger rarely exists in isolation but is often linked to housing insecurity, transportation barriers, and mental health stressors.

The looming SNAP suspension has triggered an urgent response. This week, the Allan Hancock College Foundation committed \$20,000 to Bulldog Essentials to ensure that shelves at the college’s food pantry remain stocked.

The Foundation’s President’s Circle also provides flexible aid for students facing sudden financial crises, whether from job loss, medical emergencies, or now, the loss of food benefits. These funds help cover essentials such as utilities, housing

repairs, and even DACA renewal fees.

The application process is rigorous to ensure fairness, but staff work one-on-one with students to connect them with alternative resources if they do not meet all criteria. That personalized approach is critical when larger systems are failing.

This week we reminded students not to wait to visit the Basic Needs Center and explore every available resource. We also reached out to the many community members who regularly support students through the AHC Foundation.

As always, our neighbors are stepping up to help.

In times of crisis, institutions reveal their character. Hancock is showing that we understand the assignment: meeting students' basic needs is not ancillary to education; it is education. As we brace for the ripple effects of SNAP cuts, let us continue to amplify and support these efforts.

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Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D., is the superintendent/president of Allan Hancock College.

Tags

