

Working Group on College Student Hunger Policy Priorities for the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health

College student hunger is a growing crisis. Nationally, [one in three](#) of today's college students reported experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic, and yet too often, state and federal policymakers have made it difficult or impossible for students to access resources and support that could help them meet their basic needs, including food. In September 2021, our group of leading voices on college student hunger [shared research and testimony at the first ever congressional hearing on the topic](#). We believe the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health in 2022 is a crucial opportunity to continue that conversation, one that will continue to center, prioritize the needs of students and develop a bold plan that endeavors to end hunger, not just make it more tolerable for those who experience it. We hope that the Administration will aim to do so in ways that prioritize human dignity. The signatories on this letter are using the following principles in guiding our recommendations. We believe that the Administration should seek to reduce hunger by supporting policies which:

- Are informed by people with low-incomes who are given the opportunity to participate in the policy making process;
- Prioritize reduction in poverty and inequality; and,
- Center intersectional (race, class, gender, ability, etc.) equity and inclusion as goals for prioritizing policies, ensuring that policy solutions that will impact those groups of Americans with the highest rates of hunger are prioritized.

With these principles guiding our recommendations, we have developed a list of policies that the Biden-Harris Administration and all stakeholders involved in the federal landscape can make the most meaningful contributions in their development plan to end hunger in America.

The plan to end hunger in America must include a strong focus to address the crisis of hunger, homelessness, and other basic needs among college students. We must recognize the diversity of today's college student population and the key roles they play in supporting their dependents, loved ones, and community in their day to day lives.

We congratulate Chairman McGovern and the Administration for securing \$2.5M to fund the Conference. Our community is eager to support the planning, hosting, and realization of the policies presented during our hearing.

We lift some of the key possibilities below:

Financial Aid

- Ensure full execution of the [FAFSA Simplification Act](#), and ensure colleges' estimates of food costs, as well as housing, transportation, books, and other costs are based on reliable data.
- Increase the current Pell grant maximum award
 - Index the Federal Pell Grant to inflation to increase its purchasing power from its lowest level in four decades. Whereas the Federal Pell Grant at its peak provided 70 percent of the total cost of attendance, today it provides closer to 29 percent.
 - Pass and enact the S.2081 - Pell Grant Preservation and Expansion Act of 2021.
- Make permanent federal emergency aid for students.
 - Pass the [Emergency Grant Aid for College Students Act](#), which would establish a permanent emergency grant program for students facing unanticipated expenses. Ensure students who are not currently eligible to receive federal financial aid are eligible to apply for and receive emergency grants.
- Reform inequitable Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policies to reflect student food insecurity and the fact that many students drop out of take fewer classes due to experiencing hunger or other basic needs insecurity.
 - Establish more flexibility for students to appeal loss of financial aid due to SAP based on extenuating circumstances like food insecurity (as well as homelessness), and ensure that students who leave college can have their financial aid eligibility restored no later than two years after leaving.

Public Programs

- Permanently end the unjust work for food rule and expand SNAP access for low-income college students
 - Pass and enact the [EATS Act of 2021](#) H.R. 1919 / S. 2515 to include the pursuit of postsecondary credentials to meet compliance, work participation, and/or core activity requirements for public benefit programs.
- Prevent a food cliff for students now eligible for SNAP through the temporary expansions made in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021
 - Pass and enact the Student Food Security Act of 2021 S. 1569. H.R.5591.
- Maximize college student's SNAP access under existing law to minimize loss of SNAP after public health emergency sunsets and while Congress works to eliminate the punitive work for food requirements
 - [The USDA should issue guidance](#) to states that clarifies that low-income students can meet current SNAP exemptions if approved for work study as part of their financial aid package; if enrolled in any state or local educational programs that improve their employability and should clarify that the "mental or physical unfitness" exemption includes being homeless, receiving disability or special needs accommodations through their colleges, and/or placed in college through their state's Voc Rehab program or meeting other conditions). USDA has both

the authority and obligation to remove barriers to access and equity under the existing rules.

- Pass and enact the Food for Thought Act of 2022 H.R. 6934 that would create a pilot within the National School Lunch Program to allow community colleges to serve free meals to students.
- Remove mandates to combine work with education, time restrictions, and limitations on programs or degrees in the SNAP, TANF, and Child Care Development Block program.
- Authorize USDA to exclude as countable income for SNAP and other means-tested programs any state or local financial aid as well as the part-time income of full time students, as is the case for earnings of highschool students under age 18 participating in SNAP.
- Authorize USDA to allow the deduction of student loan payments, as is the case for expenses on shelter, dependent care, and other basic needs.
- Require USDOE Department of Higher Education and colleges that receive federal grants to notify all students applying for and receiving federal financial aid, including those who are DACA-eligible, of their potential eligibility for programs like SNAP, as a part of a broad strategy to integrate federal financial aid with the public benefit programs (i.e. SNAP, WIC, HUD, TANF, child care development block grant program) to proactively award eligible students.
 - Pass and Enact the BASIC Act of 2021 S. 2004.

Our Higher Education community is grateful for and energized to support the transformative progress that will be accomplished in the planning, hosting, and implementation journeys after the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health.

The Hope Center for College, Community and Justice
Swipe Out Hunger
UC Berkeley Basic Needs Committee