

July 19th, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Collins, Chair Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

On behalf of the 49 undersigned organizations, colleges and universities, researchers, and practitioners supporting the basic needs of students in higher education, we write to support the Basic Needs for Postsecondary Students Program (“**Basic Needs Grant**”) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations process. We urge you to reject the proposed cuts to this critical program and instead boost funding to \$45 million in the final agreement.

Millions of students today do not have enough to eat or an affordable and stable place to live. Students also face immense challenges accessing affordable child care, physical and mental health care, transportation, books, technology, and more. The Basic Needs Grant program at the U.S. Department of Education amplifies other federal, state, local, and college resources that improve students’ ability to stay enrolled in and complete higher education. In particular, the program helps to meet students’ critical, and often overlapping, basic needs—without which most students simply cannot focus on their studies and stay enrolled. The recent House FY 2025 LHHS-ED bill unfortunately proposes to eliminate funding for this vital program.

The Basic Needs Grant is addressing an alarming and extensively documented crisis. Cutting the program, as the House bill proposes, would exacerbate this severe situation. Nationally representative federal data show that nearly one in four (23%) of undergraduate students are experiencing food insecurity—twice the rate of all other U.S. households. In total, more than **4.3 million** undergraduate and graduate students have low or very low food security and **1.5 million** are experiencing homelessness.¹ Research from The Hope Center at Temple University and other higher education organizations also shows that rates of basic needs insecurity are much higher for historically underrepresented students, including Black, Latine, and Indigenous students; parenting students; first-generation students; Pell Grant recipients; and former foster youth.² Students at community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges, and other Minority Serving Institutions also experience vastly higher levels of basic needs insecurity.

The Basic Needs Grant program is relatively new—first funded in FY 2021—but has already grown extremely competitive, awarding grants to less than 13 percent of eligible applicants in the previous funding cycle. Still, 17 states and Puerto Rico have institutions that have received funding, and

¹ McKibben, B., Wu, J., and Abelson, S. (2023, August). [New Federal Data Confirm that College Students Face Significant—and Unacceptable—Basic Needs Insecurity](#). The Hope Center at Temple University.

² The Hope Center at Temple University. (2021, March). [The Hope Center Survey 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic](#); Trellis Company. (2023, May). [Student Financial Wellness Survey, Fall 2022](#); Community College Survey of Student Engagement. (2022, October). [Mission critical: The role of community colleges in meeting students’ basic needs](#).

approximately 12 additional awards are expected from the current FY 2024 competition that ends next month. Reflecting the substantial demand and the range of areas institutions can use these funds for, we ask you to avoid the House-proposed cuts and instead increase support for this program to \$45 million, the same level as two other Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) programs in FY24.

Increased funding will allow more colleges and universities nationwide to fund comprehensive support for students while producing evaluations that inform how other colleges and universities can replicate and expand upon these efforts. Addressing students' basic needs through a holistic and comprehensive approach that leverages other state and federal resources (such as financial aid, public benefit programs, and tax benefits) will meet urgent student needs and build out an emerging evidence base for what works in basic needs interventions.

Congress needs to address the crisis of student basic needs insecurity to improve affordability, retention, and completion in higher education. Basic Needs Grants will help support these goals for institutions of higher education with limited resources, and help scale badly needed interventions to reach more students in need. We are thankful for the support that Congress has provided the Basic Needs Grant in previous fiscal years. We urge the House to recede on proposed cuts and for the Senate to increase these valuable investments in student wellbeing and success.

Sincerely,

The Hope Center at Temple University
American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)
American Council on Education
Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT)
Believe in Students
California Association of Food Banks
California Competes: Higher Education for a Strong Economy
Center for Healthy Communities
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center of Higher Education Policy and Practice (CHEPP) at SNHU
Complete College America
Education Trust
Feeding Texas
Food Research & Action Center
Generation Hope
Hildreth Institute
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP)
National College Attainment Network (NCAN)
New Mexico Basic Needs Consortium
Northwest Tennessee Local Food Network
Nourish California
Nourish Colorado
Ohio Association of Foodbanks
One Family
Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon

Prairie State College
San Diego Hunger Coalition
SchoolHouse Connection
Student Basic Needs Coalition
SUNY Fulton Montgomery Community College
Swipe Out Hunger
Tennessee Justice Center
The Institute for College Access & Success
Today's Students Coalition
uAspire
University of California System
University of California, Davis
University of California, Irvine
University of California, Los Angeles
University of California, San Diego
University of California, Santa Barbara
URI Feinstein Center for a Hunger Free America
Washington Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition
William E. Morris Institute for Justice
Young Invincibles