

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. _____

To amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to authorize the Secretary of Education to make grants to institutions of higher education to provide free meals to low-income students through existing on-campus meal programs, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. WELCH (for himself, Mr. LUJÁN, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. FETTERMAN, Mr. SANDERS, and Mr. WYDEN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to authorize the Secretary of Education to make grants to institutions of higher education to provide free meals to low-income students through existing on-campus meal programs, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Food for Thought Act
5 of 2023”.

1 **SEC. 2. FREE MEALS FOR LOW-INCOME COLLEGE STU-**
2 **DENTS.**

3 Part A of title IV of the Higher Education Act of
4 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070 et seq.) is amended by inserting
5 after subpart 7 the following:

6 **“Subpart 8—Meals for Low-Income Students**

7 **“SEC. 420A. FREE MEALS FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS.**

8 “(a) AUTHORIZATION.—From amounts made avail-
9 able under subsection (j), the Secretary is authorized to
10 award grants, on a competitive basis, to eligible entities
11 to provide free meals to low-income students through on-
12 campus meal programs.

13 “(b) APPLICATIONS.—

14 “(1) IN GENERAL.—An eligible entity desiring
15 to receive an award under subsection (a) shall sub-
16 mit an application to the Secretary at such time, in
17 such manner, and containing such information as
18 the Secretary may require. Such application shall in-
19 clude—

20 “(A) a plan for identifying eligible students
21 and conducting outreach; and

22 “(B) an assurance that the eligible entity
23 will—

24 “(i) conduct outreach to students with
25 respect to the grant program under this

1 section, encourage student participation in
2 such program, and inform students of—

3 “(I) their potential eligibility for
4 participation in other Federal, State,
5 and local benefit and support pro-
6 grams, including means-tested Fed-
7 eral benefits programs such as SNAP;
8 and

9 “(II) the processes for obtaining
10 more information, confirming eligi-
11 bility, and accessing benefits under
12 such programs;

13 “(ii) evaluate institutional policies re-
14 lating to the purchase of on-campus meal
15 plans and whether such policies create bar-
16 riers to enrollment and persistence for low-
17 income students;

18 “(iii) identify ways to mitigate any in-
19 stitutional policies that are found, through
20 the evaluation described in clause (ii), to
21 create barriers described in such clause;
22 and

23 “(iv) in the case of an eligible entity
24 that is a consortia of eligible institutions of
25 higher education that includes eligible in-

1 stitutions that do not have on-campus meal
2 programs, provide an explanation with re-
3 spect to how the eligible entity will ensure
4 that low-income students attending such
5 institutions will be able to easily access
6 free meals provided under this section.

7 “(2) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants under this
8 section, the Secretary shall give priority to—

9 “(A) an eligible entity that is an eligible
10 institution of higher education that is—

11 “(i) a community college;

12 “(ii) a minority-serving institution de-
13 scribed in section 371(a); or

14 “(iii) located in an area served by a
15 local educational agency that is eligible for
16 special assistance payments under section
17 11(a)(1) of the Richard B. Russell Na-
18 tional School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C.
19 1759a(a)(1)); and

20 “(B) an eligible entity that is a consortia
21 of eligible institutions of higher education, in
22 which at least 50 percent of such institutions
23 meet at least 1 of the requirements under
24 clauses (i) through (iii) of subparagraph (A).

25 “(c) MANDATORY ACTIVITIES.—

1 “(1) IN GENERAL.—An eligible entity that re-
2 ceives a grant under this section shall use such
3 grant funds to provide, through on-campus meal
4 programs, not fewer than 1, and not more than 10,
5 free meals per week to each low-income student se-
6 lected by such entity to participate in the program
7 under this section.

8 “(2) PRIORITY.—In selecting low-income stu-
9 dents to participate in the program under this sec-
10 tion, an eligible entity shall give priority to—

11 “(A) students with the greatest financial
12 need; and

13 “(B) students who indicate that they are
14 experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity,
15 homelessness, or other insecurity with respect
16 to basic needs.

17 “(d) PERMISSIBLE ACTIVITIES.—In addition to the
18 mandatory activities in subsection (c), an eligible entity
19 that receives a grant under this section may use not more
20 than 10 percent of such grant funds to—

21 “(1) facilitate the enrollment of on-campus ven-
22 dors as authorized retailers in SNAP;

23 “(2) support the operation of an on-campus
24 food pantry; and

1 this section (using benchmarks such as
2 persistence, coursework completion, trans-
3 fer, and completion rates).

4 “(B) DISAGGREGATION.—The information
5 reported in subparagraph (A)(ii) shall be
6 disaggregated, where possible, by—

7 “(i) race;

8 “(ii) ethnicity;

9 “(iii) Pell recipient status;

10 “(iv) income;

11 “(v) gender; and

12 “(vi) age.

13 “(2) SECRETARY REPORT.—

14 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year
15 after the Secretary receives the reports required
16 under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall submit
17 a report to Congress on the overall impact of
18 the program under this section.

19 “(B) DISAGGREGATION.—The information
20 described in subparagraph (A) shall be
21 disaggregated, where possible, by—

22 “(i) sectors and types of institutions;

23 “(ii) whether an institution is a mi-
24 nority-serving institution described in sec-
25 tion 371(a); and

1 “(iii) whether an institution has an
2 open admissions policy.

3 “(i) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
4 gress that an eligible entity awarded a grant under this
5 section should, to the extent practicable—

6 “(1) ensure meals served pursuant to a grant
7 under this section are consistent with the nutritional
8 requirements and goals of the most recent Dietary
9 Guidelines for Americans published under section
10 301 of the National Nutrition Monitoring and Re-
11 lated Research Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 5341);

12 “(2) ensure access to vegetarian meals, vegan
13 meals, culturally and religiously appropriate meals,
14 and meals that accommodate common food allergies;

15 “(3) build and encourage the use of on-campus
16 food pantries;

17 “(4) encourage on-campus vendors to increase
18 the use of climate-friendly options; and

19 “(5) buy products to reduce the greenhouse gas
20 emissions associated with providing free meals to
21 students and purchasing food infrastructure equip-
22 ment.

23 “(j) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
24 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section

1 such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year 2023 and
2 each of the 5 succeeding fiscal years.

3 “(k) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

4 “(1) COMMUNITY COLLEGE.—The term ‘com-
5 munity college’ means a public institution of higher
6 education at which the highest degree that is pre-
7 dominantly awarded to students is an associate’s de-
8 gree, including 2-year Tribal Colleges or Universities
9 under section 316 and public 2-year institutions of
10 higher education operated by a State.

11 “(2) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term ‘eligible en-
12 tity’ means—

13 “(A) an eligible institution of higher edu-
14 cation that has an on-campus meal program
15 that is provided through an institutionally
16 owned or operated food service or one or more
17 third-party food service vendors; or

18 “(B) a consortia of eligible institutions of
19 higher education, of which at least one has an
20 on-campus meal program that is provided
21 through an institutionally owned or operated
22 food service or one or more third-party food
23 service vendors, provided that such an eligible
24 institution with an on-campus meal program is
25 geographically accessible to the students of the

1 eligible institutions that do not have on-campus
2 meal programs.

3 “(3) ELIGIBLE INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDU-
4 CATION.—The term ‘eligible institution of higher
5 education’ means an institution of higher education
6 under section 101 or 102(a)(1)(B) in which at least
7 30 percent of the undergraduate students enrolled at
8 such institution are eligible to receive a Federal Pell
9 Grant.

10 “(4) SNAP.—The term ‘SNAP’ means the sup-
11 plemental nutrition assistance program (as defined
12 in section 3(t) of the Food and Nutrition Act of
13 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2012(t))).”.