

The Student Food Security Act of 2021

**Senators Elizabeth Warren, Chris Murphy, Alex Padilla, and Bernie Sanders
Representatives Jahana Hayes, Al Lawson, and Norma Torres**

A 2018 [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) report](#) revealed that more than 30% of college students may face food insecurity, risking their college completion and undermining federal and state investments in higher education. This problem is particularly pronounced among community college students: a [recent survey](#) found that nearly 40% of community college students are food insecure, over half are housing insecure, and 14% have experienced homelessness. Students who are worried about where their next meal will come from or where they will sleep at night will naturally have difficulty focusing on their education. In fact, 55% of students facing food insecurity [reported](#) deciding not to buy a required textbook, and 25% reported dropping a class.

Typically, college students face severe restrictions on their ability to access Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits unless they meet certain conditions, such as working more than 20 hours per week or having young children. These stringent requirements ignore the reality of today's college students, a [majority of whom are “non-traditional”](#) – older than 25, independent from their parents, and often juggling school, work, and family responsibilities. The [GAO report](#) also found that almost sixty percent of potentially eligible students were not receiving SNAP.

The *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021* temporarily expanded access to SNAP for college students during the COVID-19 public health emergency. This bill would make that expansion permanent and provide other supports to ensure that students can access the program.

The *Student Food Security Act of 2021* removes barriers to accessing SNAP for low-income college students by expanding eligibility criteria, requiring the federal government and states to take a more proactive role in outreach to food-insecure students, and creating a grant program for colleges and universities to support their students by coordinating resources on their campuses.

The Student Food Security Act:

1. **Increases low-income college students' eligibility for SNAP** by expanding eligibility to students who are eligible for work study, have a \$0 Expected Family Contribution, meet the financial eligibility criteria for a maximum Pell Grant (even if they have not filed the FAFSA), or are an independent student whose household is otherwise eligible.
2. **Increases outreach to eligible students** by directing the Department of Education to work with the Department of Agriculture and other relevant agencies to notify students that they may be eligible for benefits when they file their application for federal student aid.
3. **Requires the Department of Education to collect data** on food and housing insecurity.
4. **Creates a SNAP student hunger demonstration program** that would allow students to use their SNAP benefits at on-campus dining facilities at up to ten institutions.
5. **Establishes a \$1 billion per year grant program** to help institutions of higher education identify and meet the food and housing security of their students. Grants can be used for research, planning, and implementation of a strategy to conduct outreach to students and coordinate resources. At least 33% of grants must go to community colleges, and institutions with high percentages of Pell recipients, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and other Minority-Serving Institutions will also receive priority.