

# Basic Assistance for Students in College (BASIC) Act

## Representative Norma Torres & U.S Senator Alex Padilla



### Issue:

A 2024 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report revealed that nearly 3.8 million college students experienced food insecurity in 2020. According to a 2023 Student Basic Needs Survey, 67 percent of surveyed students at a community college in Rancho Cucamonga, CA, experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness. This widespread hunger crisis is affecting college campuses nationwide, jeopardizing students' success and undermining federal efforts to reduce college dropout rates. Many students are also unaware of their eligibility for critical safety net programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. In fact, the GAO report also found that almost 60 percent of potentially eligible students were not receiving SNAP benefits.

The BASIC Act would support colleges and universities in addressing the unmet basic needs of their students by establishing a \$1 billion competitive grant program and improving data sharing among federal agencies that administer public assistance programs.

### Summary of Bill:

**Basic Needs Grant Program:** Establishes a \$1 billion competitive grant program to help institutions of higher education identify and meet the basic needs of students, which include access to nutritious food, safe and secure housing, mental and physical healthcare, high-quality and affordable childcare, technology, transportation, personal hygiene, and other necessities.

- **Implementation Grants (\$960 million):** Authorizes 5-year implementation grants of up to \$1 million for institutions of higher education to develop a basic needs infrastructure. Grantees must use funds to carry out at least two of the following activities to meet basic needs:
  - Provide free or subsidized food, secure sleeping arrangements, temporary housing, priority access to existing on campus child care, and other basic needs to eligible students;
  - Conduct outreach to students to encourage participation in basic needs programs and services and help eligible students apply for and enroll in local, state, and federal public assistance programs;
  - Coordinate and collaborate with government and/or community-based organizations;
  - Purchase materials, equipment, transportation, and facilities; hire personnel to facilitate implementation; or other matters determined by the Secretary.
- **Planning Grants (\$40 million):** Authorizes 2-year planning grants of up to \$75,000 for institutions of higher education to conduct basic needs research and develop a plan to address unmet basic needs at the institution.
- **Carve out for HBCUs and MSIs:** Requires at least 25% of planning and implementation grants must go to community colleges, institutions with 25% or higher Pell enrollment, historically Black colleges and universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs).
- **Evaluation:** Directs the Department of Education to review the success and challenges for grant recipients in addressing basic needs of students and measuring student outcomes for institutions that receive funding grants.

**Connect Students to Federal Assistance:** This Act, requires the Department of Education to coordinate with the Departments of Agriculture, Housing & Urban Development, and Health & Human Services to identify current students who may be eligible for federal means-tested programs, including SNAP, SS I, TANF, WIC, Medicaid, federal housing assistance, federal child care programs, free and reduced price lunch, EITC, CTC, and other programs; and coordinate efforts to help institutions of higher education enroll eligible students.

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A student from CA-35 shares her story about her challenges pursuing a college degree as a foster youth, which is why we need to pass my BASIC Act to provide more support for basic needs. “My name is Eve Valdez. I am a sophomore here at Chaffey College. I’m a double major, studying psychology and religion. I grew up in the foster system, so just kind of bounced around growing up. But a couple of things I’ve faced that has challenged me with housing and food was being on the streets from 13 to 19 years old... Some challenges there was: having to leave my items in this car, having hood problems, someone might come steal it, someone might come and blackmail me for my things... I had to go other places to shower, such as the TAY Center, to study at the TAY Center, something that was safe and that I can just focus in and have air conditioning in.”

“Chaffey College was able to help me temporarily, with those daily needs, but for the long term, there wasn’t really a lot of resources, or people to share those with me”. – *Eve Valdez, Chaffey College Student*

“I am currently a MSW grad student, Intern, and single parent to a 5 year old. The basic needs department on campus has granted me emergency funds. These funds not only helped me stay in school, but helped my mental health. As a graduate student I no longer qualify for Pell grants or work study. I have been carrying 18 units, unpaid internship for 16 hours (grad requirement), and am the sole provider for my child. It has been nearly impossible to add work to my already heavy load. I rely on CalFresh and Medicare to get by. There have been months where I need help with rent, childcare (\$835 monthly), utilities, and/or basic needs. The basic needs of emergency funds have helped me get through those hard times. Next week I have a meeting with basic needs because this is the month I need extra support. Without their help I would have to stretch myself to meet my daughter and my basic needs.” -*Anonymous*

“As a single parenting student, I have relied on food resources to help me feed my children and myself. In the past, it has been hard to navigate all the responsibilities of mothering, being a full-time student, and working part-time. Having basic needs through campus has been a tremendous help that I rely heavily on. It helps me to be able to a lot money towards other necessities such as toiletries and gas that we would otherwise be going without to eat. In addition to food, Basic Needs has provided emergency funds for me at times when I needed extra support. As a parenting student, basic needs is one of the most valuable resources I utilize to help me survive while obtaining my degree.” -*Anonymous*

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“The basic needs hub is an absolute lifesaver. Sometimes I can’t afford to go to the grocery store to get healthy food options and when those times come I know that I can go to the basic needs hub and get the healthy snacks or meals that I’m in need of. It is hard to stay fed and healthy when you are a college student and I am just super grateful that the hub and all the wonderful people who work there are around!!

The emergency fund has saved me from going into collections. I have had some medical emergencies while attending CSUMB and when I was told about the emergency fund I was relieved because I finally had gotten the financial need that I had been dreaming of. I thought I would have to drop out to afford my medical bills but with the emergency fund I got the extra time I needed to come up with my next month’s payment!” - *California State University (CSU) Monterey Bay Student*