
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6229

AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

SUMMARY

This bill makes a number of changes designed to assess and address food insecurity for the state's public college and university students. It defines "food insecurity" or "food insecure" as the lack of financial resources needed to consistently access enough food for an active and healthy life.

Specifically, the bill requires public colleges and universities to do the following:

1. starting by March 1, 2022, biennially administer a survey to enrolled students to collect data on student food insecurity and the causes and reasons for it;
2. starting by October 1, 2022, biennially evaluate their services and programs addressing the needs of food-insecure students and, based on the survey results, establish new services and programs, or amend existing ones, to address these students' needs;
3. starting by January 1, 2023, biennially report to the Higher Education Committee on the (a) survey results; (b) food insecurity services and programs offered, including any changes made based on the survey results; and (c) number of students who used the services and programs in the preceding two years; and
4. notify specified students about their potential eligibility for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

The bill requires the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) and UConn Board of Trustees (BOT) to consult with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to identify and maximize the number of work-study programs they offer that qualify as an employment and training program for purposes of SNAP.

Lastly, the bill requires DSS, when determining SNAP eligibility, to consider a state public college or university student to be participating in a federal work-study program as soon as the student is approved for the program as part of a financial aid package to attend the college or university, regardless of whether the student has received his or her work study program assignment yet. Under federal law, a student who is actively participating in a state or federally funded work-study program is eligible to receive SNAP benefits. Special eligibility rules apply during the COVID-19 public health emergency for students who are eligible to participate in work study (see BACKGROUND).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2021

§ 1 — FOOD INSECURITY SURVEY

Under the bill, the survey administered by each public college and university must include questions about a student’s (1) demographic background, including age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, marital status, income, education, and employment; (2) specific barriers to food access; and (3) awareness or use of community or institutional resources to address food insecurity and barriers to accessing these resources.

§ 2 — PROGRAMS AND SERVICES ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY

Under the bill, the services or programs that public colleges and universities establish or modify to address student food insecurity may include the following:

1. assistance and support for students to enroll in SNAP or any other state or federal nutrition assistance or financial aid program, including programs for families, if applicable;

2. providing low-cost food or meal plan options on campus;
3. allowing students additional meals through extra card swipes on meal plans;
4. providing financial assistance or other financial student aid;
5. establishing or expanding on-campus food pantries; and
6. starting a fruit and vegetable incentive program or similar program for students through an agreement with a local nonprofit or government agency.

The bill requires services and programs amended or established based on survey results to serve to at least 10% of the students identified in the survey as being food insecure.

§§ 3 & 4 — SNAP ELIGIBILITY FOR PUBLIC COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

By January 1, 2022, the bill requires BOR and BOT to consult with DSS to (1) identify any of their offered educational programs that would increase a student’s employability and qualify as an employment and training program under SNAP student eligibility requirements (see BACKGROUND) and (2) maximize the number and types of these programs offered. BOR, BOT, and DSS must also post and regularly update the list of these qualified programs offered at each institution under their governance on their website. The bill allows any of the state’s public colleges and universities to consult with DSS to identify these programs.

The bill requires each public higher education institution to notify students identified by the institution’s financial aid office as being potentially eligible for SNAP and include in the notification (1) program eligibility requirements, (2) the program application process, and (3) information on assistance in completing the program application.

BACKGROUND

SNAP Student Eligibility

Students enrolled at least half-time at a higher education institution are generally ineligible for SNAP unless they qualify for an exemption. These exemptions include participating in a (1) state or federally financed work study program and (2) SNAP employment and training program or other eligible program.

The federal Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021 temporarily extends SNAP eligibility to students enrolled at least half-time at a higher education institution who either (1) are eligible to participate in a state or federally funded work-study program during the academic year or (2) have an expected family contribution of zero in the academic year, and meet all other SNAP eligibility criteria. This benefit extension will remain in effect until 30 days after the COVID-19 public health emergency ends.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 18 Nay 4 (03/11/2021)