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Bill Analysis

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsors: Reps. Brennan and Dobos

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SUMMARY

- Requires the Chancellor of Higher Education to establish and administer the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program and designation.
 - Qualifies state institutions of higher education and private nonprofit institutions of higher education to receive initial grants for demonstrating a commitment to basic needs infrastructure and an intention to pursue the hunger-free campus designation.
 - Qualifies institutions that hold a hunger-free campus designation for additional grants and higher grant awards.
- Requires grants under the program to be used to support or leverage existing basic needs infrastructure, maximize federal programs, build strategic partnerships at the local, state, and national levels to address food insecurity among students, and to raise awareness on resources available to address basic food needs.
- Requires the Chancellor to prepare a report on the Hunger-Free Grant Program within two years of the program's establishment.
- Appropriates \$2.5 million in FY 2025 to the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program.
- Entitles the bill the Hunger-Free Campus Act.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program

The bill requires the Chancellor of Higher Education to establish and administer the hunger-free campus grant program and designation. Under the program, the Chancellor must award grants to qualifying institutions, prioritizing institutions with higher percentages of Pell grant-eligible students enrolled. Institutions must use grants to support or leverage existing basic needs infrastructure, maximize federal programs, build strategic partnerships at the local,

state, and national levels to address food insecurity among students, and raise awareness on resources available to address basic food needs.¹ “Qualifying institutions” under the bill include state institutions of higher education and private nonprofit institutions of higher education.²

The bill requires the Chancellor to develop an application process for the grant program. A qualifying institution is eligible for an initial grant if it demonstrates a commitment to basic needs infrastructure and intends to use funds to pursue the hunger-free campus designation. A qualifying institution with an existing hunger-free campus designation is eligible to apply for additional grants. The bill also requires the Chancellor to develop a method to determine the amount of a grant awarded to an institution, including a tiered system for awards that permits institutions with existing hunger-free campus designations to receive larger grants.³

Each qualifying institution that receives a grant under the program must report to the Chancellor how the grant is used and its effects on food security on the institution’s campus for the academic year in which the grant is received. If an institution has not received a hunger-free campus designation, it must also report its progress toward qualifying for the designation.⁴

Hunger-free campus designation

The bill requires the Chancellor to develop an application process for a qualifying institution to receive a hunger-free campus designation. The Chancellor must award a hunger-free campus designation to each qualifying institution that the Chancellor determines satisfies two conditions.⁵ A hunger-free campus designation lasts for two years.⁶

First condition

To meet the first condition, a qualifying institution must either:

1. Provide free meals to students who have demonstrated food insecurity or establish campus emergency funds for such students; or
2. Assist students with accessing food pantries or charitable food distributions by establishing an on-campus food pantry or charitable distribution.

Providing free meals or campus emergency funds

The bill permits an institution that opts to provide free meals or establish campus emergency funds for students who have demonstrated food insecurity to establish a definition or method by which to identify students who have demonstrated food insecurity. However,

¹ R.C. 3333.47(B)(1).

² R.C. 3333.47(A).

³ R.C. 3333.47(B)(2) and (3).

⁴ R.C. 3333.47(B)(4).

⁵ R.C. 3333.47(C).

⁶ R.C. 3333.47(D).

that definition must include students with an expected family contribution of \$0 and students who are work-study eligible, as determined through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Free meals or funds may be provided through any of the following methods:⁷

1. Establishing a student meal plan credit donation program through which enrolled students with a purchased meal plan may donate any meal on such plan to the program and any enrolled student who has demonstrated food insecurity may apply to redeem a donated meal at a meal-plan eligible on-campus dining location in accordance with applicable food safety regulations;
2. Designating an amount of the institution's funds for free meal vouchers or gift cards for students who have demonstrated food insecurity that may be used at campus stores, eateries, or local establishments; or
3. Establishing a campus emergency fund to support students with emergency expenses, including those associated with food, shelter, utilities, and childcare. An institution must limit barriers to access those funds.

Establishing food pantries or charitable food distributions

The bill requires an institution that opts to assist students by establishing a food pantry or charitable food distribution on campus to make all food provided at the pantry or distribution free to all students. Institutions are prohibited from requiring students to demonstrate need to access the pantry or distribution. However, an institution may require an individual to show a valid student identification card to access food at the pantry or distribution. An on-campus food pantry must include at least one staffed physical food pantry on the institution's campus located in a safe and secure environment. The institution must also include measures to ensure that students may receive food from the food pantry without facing stigma.

The bill requires institutions to provide notice of the food pantry or charitable distribution on the institution's website, including hours of operation and updated contact information for staff members involved in operating the pantry or distribution and information on other efforts to address hunger at the institution.⁸

Second condition

To satisfy the second condition for a hunger-free campus designation under the bill, a qualifying institution must meet at least three of the five following criteria:

1. Ensure that students have access to accurate and current information about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), other available food assistance programs, and programs that support basic needs security, including program eligibility,

⁷ R.C. 3333.47(C)(1)(a).

⁸ R.C. 3333.47(C)(1)(b).

application processes, and how to use program benefits. An institution may satisfy this criteria by doing any of the following:

- a. Including information on food assistance and basic needs security programs in all financial aid information;
 - b. Including information on food assistance and basic needs security programs in new student orientation materials;
 - c. Including information on food assistance and basic needs security programs in each course syllabus; or
 - d. Posting information on food assistance and basic needs security programs in all on-campus housing locations.
2. Designate at least one on-campus employee who students may contact for information on SNAP, other available food assistance programs, and programs that support basic needs security.
 3. Notify, on an individual basis, students who receive need-based financial aid of their potential eligibility to receive benefits under SNAP.
 4. Conduct an anonymous, campus-wide survey assessing student food security at least once every two years.
 5. Sponsor at least one event per academic semester to spread awareness about student hunger and provide information to students about services available on campus to alleviate student hunger.⁹

The graphic below provides a simplified illustration of the requirements for a hunger-free campus designation.

⁹ R.C. 3333.47(C)(2).

Hunger-free campus designation

Condition 1 (must satisfy one)

- Provide free meals for students with demonstrated food insecurity or establish campus emergency funds
- Establish an on-campus food pantry or charitable distribution

Condition 2 (must satisfy three)

- Share information on food assistance and basic needs security programs
- Designate an on-campus employee as contact for information on food assistance and basic needs security programs
- Notify individual students of potential eligibility to receive benefits under SNAP
- Conduct campus-wide survey assessing student food security at least once every two years
- Sponsor at least one event per semester to spread awareness and give information about services available to alleviate student hunger

Report

The bill requires the Chancellor of Higher Education to, within two years of the establishment of the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program, prepare a report on the program. The Chancellor must submit the report to the Governor and the General Assembly. The report must include all of the following:¹⁰

1. The number and amounts of grant awards under the program;
2. Examples of how students were supported by the program and how the funding helped students continue their education;
3. Examples of the impact of the grant program on establishing additional hunger-free campuses at qualifying institutions and reducing the number of students experiencing food insecurity; and
4. Any recommendations regarding the establishment of an annual appropriation for the grant program.

¹⁰ Section 2.

Appropriation

The bill appropriates \$2.5 million in fiscal year 2025 to support the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program.¹¹

HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	05-15-24

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¹¹ Section 4.