

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy,

Today's students who are currently enrolled in postsecondary education—who are more likely to be older, working and parenting—face substantial hurdles as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Today's Students Coalition—a group of 21 cross-cutting policy, advocacy, and membership organizations that have joined forces to advocate for urgently needed policy changes to better serve today's students—appreciates the steps already aimed toward supporting students passed in the CARES Act, and we urge you to keep today's students top of mind in future measures.

Basic needs, health, and wellness continue to be insurmountable challenges for today's students. According to survey data from the The Hope Center, 39 percent of students reported food insecurity in the prior 30 days; 46 percent reported housing insecurity in the previous year; and 17 percent reported experiencing homelessness in the previous year.¹

Food Insecurity

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) offers nutrition assistance to low-income individuals and families. However, as a default, all postsecondary students are ineligible and can only receive SNAP benefits if they meet specific exclusions to the rule. Further, many students who would otherwise be eligible do not ultimately receive benefits under the program. A 2018 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that of the 3.3 million students who were potentially eligible for SNAP in 2016, less than half received benefits.²

States have reported dramatic increases in SNAP applications in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic: in Kentucky, March enrollment in SNAP increased by 5.8 percent,³ in Connecticut, applications for SNAP have tripled,⁴ and Indiana has seen a 253 percent increase in SNAP applications since the pandemic began.⁵ According to Feed America, the number of Americans experiencing food insecurity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and unemployment is likely to jump 46 percent.⁶

As postsecondary students are continuing to face food insecurity—likely at similar increasing rates—we urge you to allow states to waive the student exclusion, making otherwise income-eligible students able to participate in the SNAP program for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure increased food access for today's students.

Supporting Students' Emergency Needs

¹ <https://hope4college.com/realcollege-2020-five-years-of-evidence-on-basic-needs-insecurity/>

² <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/696254.pdf>

³ <https://kypolicy.org/tracking-snap-in-kentucky/>

⁴ <https://ctmirror.org/2020/04/03/ct-enrollment-in-food-stamps-soars-but-theres-a-wait-for-benefits/>

⁵ <https://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/indiana-announces-additions-to-food-stamp-benefits>

⁶ <https://foodbanknews.com/food-banks-will-need-1-4-billion-over-six-months-feeding-america-says/>

When college campuses closed across the country, students lost more than access to classrooms and student centers—they lost access to residence halls and dining facilities or food pantries. They may have had unexpected expenses such as transportation home, storage rental, or security deposits and rent for new homes, and increased costs for services like internet access. Further, students—like the over 30 million Americans who have recently filed for unemployment—may also be facing job loss or reduction in hours or pay.

The CARES Act included the disbursement of direct payments to most Americans, known as “stimulus checks.” These \$1,200 payments were intended to offer financial assistance for the majority of Americans, many of whom are struggling as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but today’s students were largely ineligible for these payments. Students who are “financially independent”—generally meaning that they are 24 or older, married, a veteran, or have a legal dependent—and did not file a tax return in FY 2018 will only receive a check if they complete an online form. Neither did dependent students over the age of 16, and their families’ payment did not include such students in their payment determination, either.

Beyond the stimulus checks, the CARES Act included \$6.28 billion aimed at enabling institutions to offer “emergency aid” payments to students who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Institutions became eligible to apply for these funds on April 9th, but on April 21st the Secretary of Education issued guidance that excluded DACA-eligible students, less than part-time students, and those that are enrolled in courses that are not eligible for Title IV student aid from being able to receive emergency aid. Further, it has been reported some institutions are choosing to not apply for CARES Act emergency aid funds due to onerous requirements, and others have struggled under the administrative complexities of the Secretary’s guidance in determining student eligibility.

As a result of the shortcomings in these provisions, more than one million students have been left behind by the CARES Act. We urge you to right these wrongs and financially support students in future COVID-19-related legislation by enabling stimulus checks to be issued to all students or through the creation of a direct student support grant program.

As you continue deliberating next steps to support Americans during this time, we ask that today’s students are not continued to be left behind.

Sincerely,
The Today’s Students Coalition

Higher Learning Advocates
Jobs for the Future
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Skills Coalition
National College Attainment Network
Student Veterans of America

UPCEA

Veterans Education Success

Young Invincibles

Advance Vermont

Association of Big Ten Students

COABE

Center for First-generation Student Success

Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)