

April 13, 2021

Dear Chairman Frank & Honorable Committee Members,

Texas PACE consists of organizations committed to equity in college affordability, access, student supports and completion. We support increased access to necessary health and wellness resources for students to pursue and complete a postsecondary education, and believe that HB 2126 will help provide greater food security for Texans as they acquire the quality training and skills they need to succeed in the workforce and grow our state's economy.

Food insecurity can be a significant barrier for college-going students. This bill would use existing flexibilities in federal regulations to help low-income students enrolled in approved vocational or technical training programs access SNAP benefits. This is especially critical in light of the pandemic and its ongoing impact. In an April 2020 survey conducted by the Texas Association of Community Colleges, 48% of students reported being likely to experience some level of food insecurity within thirty days and 57% reported losing income or work hours. Because food security is fluid, access to SNAP benefits can help students continue their course of study through unexpected challenges.

Especially amidst changes to unemployment and work during the pandemic, food insecurity can severely disrupt postsecondary persistence. The vast majority, 79%, of students enrolled in Texas public two-year colleges report working 20 or more hours per week,² and more than half of students in a 2019 survey reported that they would have trouble getting \$500 to meet an unexpected need.³ When Texas' unemployment rate spikes like it has during the pandemic, many of these students are forced to choose between their immediate needs and their future aspirations.

Food insecurity impacts academic performance. Students who struggle with food security often face hard choices in how to allocate their scarce time and often are forced to neglect academic work in order to obtain more steady access to food.4 Hard-working Texans should instead have access to the basic resources needed to thrive - including access to nutrition - so they can focus on building their career and achieving economic self-sufficiency.

https://www.trelliscompany.org/state-of-student-aid-2021/section-7-need-and-work/

https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SOSA-2021-1-Pager.pdf

Trellis Company. "Studying on Empty: A Qualitative Study of Low Food Security Among College Students." https://www.trelliscompany.org/new-report-examines-college-students-ability-to-meet-basic-food-needs-and-the-im pact-it-has-on-their-education-aspirations/

¹ Texas Association of Community Colleges. "Student Needs Survey Initial Findings." https://www.dropbox.com/s/sszweol2qdx4es4/TACC%20Student%20Needs%20Survey.pptx?dl=0#

² Trellis Company. "State of Student Aid in Texas 2021."

³ Trellis Company. State of Student Aid in Texas 2021."

HB 2126 will benefit the state of Texas by making sure students can access quality vocational and technical programs that prepare them for quality jobs along with the support they need to successfully complete these programs.

Sincerely,

The following members of Texas PACE (Postsecondary Advocates Coalition for Equity):

The Education Trust in Texas
Every Texan
IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association)
Young Invincibles
Breakthrough Central Texas