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HOUSE BILL NO. 2240

Offered January 13, 2025

Prefiled January 7, 2025

A BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 23.1-409.2, relating to institutions of higher education; Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry Grant Program established; report.

Patrons—Cousins, Anthony, Helmer, Simonds, Bennett-Parker, Clark, Cohen, Cole, Convirs-Fowler, Feggans, Gardner, Henson, Hernandez, LeVere Bolling, Maldonado, Martinez, McQuinn, Price, Rasoul, Seibold, Shin and Ward

Referred to Committee on Education

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 23.1-409.2 as follows:

§ 23.1-409.2. Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry Grant Program.

A. As used in this section, "eligible private institution of higher education" means a nonprofit private institution of higher education whose primary purpose is to provide collegiate, graduate, or professional education and not to provide religious training or theological education.

B. The Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry Grant Program (the Program) is established for the purposes of (i) addressing student food insecurity at public institutions of higher education and eligible private institutions of higher education; (ii) leveraging more sustainable solutions to address basic food needs on campuses of public institutions of higher education and eligible private institutions of higher education; (iii) raising awareness of services offered on campuses at public institutions of higher education and eligible private institutions of higher education to address food insecurity; and (iv) building strategic partnerships at the federal, state, and local levels to address food insecurity among students at public institutions of higher education. The Program shall be managed by the Council and available for participation by public institutions of higher education; however, participation in the Program shall be optional for such institutions. The Council shall review applications from such institutions, and if an institution satisfies all of the criteria set out in subsection C, it shall receive a "Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry" designation and the Council shall award a grant to such institution. The Council shall prioritize grants and grant amounts to institutions with the highest percentage of students eligible to receive a Federal Pell Grant enrolled in such institution. The Program shall be funded by moneys from the state general fund. An institution that receives a grant pursuant to this section shall utilize the funds to support on-campus efforts and initiatives to eliminate student food insecurity at such institution through the maintenance and operation of its food pantry established pursuant to subdivision C 2.

C. To receive a "Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry" designation and receive funding under the Program, a public institution of higher education or an eligible private institution of higher education shall:

1. Develop a student meal credit donation program or designate a certain amount of funds for free food vouchers or gift cards that can be used at campus stores, eateries, or local establishments. Each public institution of higher education or eligible private institution of higher education may develop its own procedures for a meal donation program.

2. Establish an on-campus food pantry or partner with a local food bank to provide information to students about food services in the local area. All food provided from the on-campus food pantry shall be free of charge, and no student shall be required to demonstrate food insecurity to access such pantry. However, an institution may require that an individual show a valid student identification card to access food from the on-campus food pantry.

2. That the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia shall submit a public report to the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Education and Health and the House Committee on Education no later than two years after the establishment of the Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry Grant Program (the Program) established under § 23.1-409.2 of the Code of Virginia, as created by this act. The report shall include (i) the total number and amounts of grant awards, (ii) information about the impact that the Program has had on reducing food insecurity in participating institutions of higher education, and (iii) recommendations regarding the potential establishment of an annual appropriation for the Program.

INTRODUCED

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