

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 10415

To amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to make grants to certain institutions of higher education to provide free meals to low-income students, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 16, 2026

Ms. BARRAGÁN (for herself, Mrs. BEATTY, Mr. CARBAJAL, Mr. CARTER of Louisiana, Ms. CLARKE of New York, Mr. COSTA, Ms. CROCKETT, Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, Ms. DEAN of Pennsylvania, Mr. DESAULNIER, Mr. GARCÍA of Illinois, Ms. GARCIA of Texas, Mr. HORSFORD, Mr. JACKSON of Illinois, Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY, Mr. LYNCH, Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin, Mr. MOULTON, Ms. NORTON, Mr. PANETTA, Ms. ROSS, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Mr. SMITH of Washington, Ms. STANSBURY, Ms. TLAIB, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, and Ms. WILSON of Florida) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and Workforce

A BILL

To amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to make grants to certain institutions of higher education to provide free meals to low-income students, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Food for Thought Act
3 of 2026”.

4 **SEC. 2. FREE MEALS FOR LOW-INCOME COLLEGE STU-**
5 **DENTS.**

6 Section 18 of the Richard B. Russell National School
7 Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1769) is amended by inserting be-
8 fore subsection (b) the following:

9 “(a) FREE MEALS FOR LOW-INCOME COLLEGE STU-
10 DENTS.—

11 “(1) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

12 “(A) COMMUNITY COLLEGE.—The term
13 ‘community college’ means—

14 “(i) a public institution of higher edu-
15 cation at which the highest degree that is
16 predominantly awarded to students is an
17 associate degree, including Tribal Colleges
18 or Universities receiving grants under sec-
19 tion 316 of the Higher Education Act of
20 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1059c) that offer a 2-
21 year program for completion of such de-
22 gree and State public institutions of higher
23 education that offer such a 2-year pro-
24 gram; and

25 “(ii) a public postsecondary vocational
26 institution (as defined in section 102(c) of

1 the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
2 U.S.C. 1002(c)).

3 “(B) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—

4 “(i) IN GENERAL.—The term ‘eligible
5 entity’ means—

6 “(I) an eligible institution of
7 higher education that has an on-cam-
8 pus meal program;

9 “(II) an institutionally operated
10 food service, contracted prepared-meal
11 provider, mobile meal distribution,
12 food hub, food pantry, food hall, or
13 community-based meal partnership, as
14 determined by the Secretary; or

15 “(III) a consortium of eligible in-
16 stitutions of higher education, of
17 which at least 1 eligible institution of
18 higher education—

19 “(aa) has an on-campus
20 meal program; and

21 “(bb) is geographically ac-
22 cessible to the students of each
23 eligible institution of higher edu-
24 cation in the consortium that

1 does not have an on-campus meal
2 program.

3 “(ii) GEOGRAPHIC ACCESSIBILITY.—
4 For purposes of clause (i)(III)(bb), geo-
5 graphic accessibility shall be based on the
6 location of, the availability of public transit
7 to, and the meal service hours of each eli-
8 gible institution of higher education within
9 the consortium.

10 “(C) ELIGIBLE INSTITUTION OF HIGHER
11 EDUCATION.—The term ‘eligible institution of
12 higher education’ means an institution of higher
13 education (as defined in sections 101 and
14 102(a)(1)(B) of the Higher Education Act of
15 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001, 1002(a)(1)(B))), includ-
16 ing a minority-serving institution, in which at
17 least 20 percent of the undergraduate students
18 enrolled are eligible to receive a Federal Pell
19 Grant under subpart 1 of part A of title IV of
20 that Act (20 U.S.C. 1070a et seq.).

21 “(D) HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE OR
22 UNIVERSITY.—The term ‘historically Black col-
23 lege or university’ has the meaning given the
24 term ‘part B institution’ in section 322 of the

1 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
2 1061).

3 “(E) MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTION.—
4 The term ‘minority-serving institution’ means
5 an institution described in paragraphs (1)
6 through (7) of section 371(a) of the Higher
7 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1067q(a)).

8 “(F) ON-CAMPUS MEAL PROGRAM.—The
9 term ‘on-campus meal program’ means a meal
10 program on the campus of an eligible institu-
11 tion of higher education that is provided
12 through an institutionally owned or operated
13 food service or 1 or more third-party food serv-
14 ice vendors.

15 “(G) PROGRAM.—The term ‘program’
16 means the program established under para-
17 graph (2)(A).

18 “(H) TRIBAL COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY.—
19 The term ‘Tribal college or university’ means a
20 Tribal College or University (as defined in sec-
21 tion 316(b) of the Higher Education Act of
22 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1059c(b)) that is chartered by
23 the governing body of the applicable Indian
24 Tribe or by the Federal Government.

25 “(2) ESTABLISHMENT.—

1 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, acting
2 through the Administrator of the Food and Nu-
3 trition Service, shall establish a program under
4 which the Secretary shall award grants, on a
5 competitive basis, to eligible institutions of
6 higher education to provide free meals, includ-
7 ing snacks, to low-income students.

8 “(B) DURATION OF GRANT.—The duration
9 of a grant awarded under the program shall not
10 exceed 2 years.

11 “(3) APPLICATION.—To be eligible to receive a
12 grant under the program, an eligible entity shall
13 submit to the Secretary an application at such time,
14 in such manner, and containing such information as
15 the Secretary may require, including—

16 “(A) a plan for identifying and conducting
17 outreach to low-income students; and

18 “(B) an assurance that the eligible entity
19 will—

20 “(i) conduct outreach to students with
21 respect to the program, encourage student
22 participation in the program, and inform
23 students of—

24 “(I) their potential eligibility for
25 participation in other Federal, State,

1 and local benefit and support pro-
2 grams, including means-tested Fed-
3 eral benefits programs, such as the
4 supplemental nutrition assistance pro-
5 gram established under the Food and
6 Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011
7 et seq.); and

8 “(II) the processes for obtaining
9 more information, confirming eligi-
10 bility, and accessing benefits under
11 those programs;

12 “(ii) evaluate institutional policies re-
13 lating to the purchase of meal plans under
14 on-campus meal programs and whether
15 those policies create barriers to enrollment
16 and persistence for low-income students;

17 “(iii) identify ways to mitigate any
18 barriers under institutional policies that
19 are found, through the evaluation de-
20 scribed in clause (ii), to create barriers de-
21 scribed in that clause; and

22 “(iv) in the case of an eligible entity
23 that is a consortium of eligible institutions
24 of higher education that includes 1 or more
25 eligible institutions of higher education

1 that do not have an on-campus meal pro-
2 gram, provide an explanation with respect
3 to how the eligible entity will ensure that
4 low-income students attending those insti-
5 tutions of higher education that do not
6 have an on-campus meal program will be
7 notified of available free meals provided
8 under the program and available transpor-
9 tation options to be able to easily access
10 those free meals.

11 “(4) AWARD ADMINISTRATION.—

12 “(A) IN GENERAL.—In awarding grants
13 under the program, the Secretary shall ensure
14 that the eligible entities receiving grants re-
15 flect—

16 “(i) varying student body size;

17 “(ii) part-time and full-time student
18 enrollment;

19 “(iii) diverse geographic locations and
20 regional costs of living, including urban,
21 rural, or suburban campuses; and

22 “(iv) diverse residential character, in-
23 cluding race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic
24 status.

1 “(B) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants
2 under the program, the Secretary may give pri-
3 ority to eligible entities—

4 “(i) with prepared food infrastructure
5 or that can identify an outside source of
6 support to develop that infrastructure;

7 “(ii) that are community colleges, his-
8 torically Black colleges and universities,
9 Tribal colleges and universities, Hispanic-
10 serving institutions (as defined in section
11 502(a) of the Higher Education Act of
12 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1101a(a))), or other mi-
13 nority-serving institutions or consortia of
14 minority-serving institutions; or

15 “(iii) that are located within proximity
16 of a school that elects to receive special as-
17 sistance payments under section
18 11(a)(1)(F).

19 “(5) USE OF FUNDS.—

20 “(A) IN GENERAL.—An eligible entity that
21 receives a grant under the program shall use
22 the grant—

23 “(i) to establish a program to provide
24 free meals, including snacks, to low-income
25 students, subject to the condition that the

1 eligible entity shall provide not fewer than
2 1 and not more than 10 free meals per
3 week per student;

4 “(ii) to conduct outreach to students
5 to encourage participation in the program;

6 “(iii) to prepare meals to be provided
7 for free under the program;

8 “(iv) to purchase meals from vendors
9 to be provided for free under the program;

10 “(v) to provide information to stu-
11 dents regarding potential eligibility for as-
12 sistance under Federal, State, and local
13 benefit and support programs and the
14 processes for obtaining more information,
15 as described in paragraph (3)(B)(i);

16 “(vi) to conduct evaluations of institu-
17 tional policies described in paragraph
18 (3)(B)(ii);

19 “(vii) to identify ways to mitigate bar-
20 riers described in paragraph (3)(B)(iii);
21 and

22 “(viii) to provide an explanation de-
23 scribed in paragraph (3)(B)(iv).

24 “(B) PRIORITY.—In selecting low-income
25 students to participate in the program estab-

lished by the eligible entity under subparagraph
(A)(i), an eligible entity shall give priority to
low-income students who—

“(i) receive a Federal Pell Grant
under subpart 1 of part A of title IV of the
Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
1070a et seq.);

“(ii) indicate that they are experi-
encing or at risk of experiencing food inse-
curity, housing insecurity, homelessness, or
other insecurity with respect to basic
needs; or

“(iii) participate in a State or feder-
ally financed work-study program during
the regular school year, as determined by
the eligible institution of higher education.

“(C) LIMITATION ON PURCHASE OF EQUIP-
MENT.—An eligible entity that receives a grant
under the program may use not more than 20
percent of the grant to purchase equipment.

“(D) ELIGIBILITY FOR SNAP.—Receipt of
a meal under the program shall not be consid-
ered for the purposes of determining eligibility
for the supplemental nutrition assistance pro-

1 gram established under the Food and Nutrition
2 Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.).

3 “(6) REQUIREMENT.—Meals served by an eligi-
4 ble entity using a grant under the program shall
5 meet the nutritional requirements developed under
6 paragraph (9)(C).

7 “(7) REPORT.—Each eligible entity that re-
8 ceives a grant under the program shall, not later
9 than 1 year after the end of the grant term, submit
10 to the Secretary a report containing—

11 “(A) a description of the prevalence of
12 food insecurity among students enrolled in the
13 eligible entity;

14 “(B) an evaluation of the use of the grant
15 funds by the eligible entity, including—

16 “(i) in addressing challenges with food
17 insecurity; and

18 “(ii) with respect to the degree com-
19 pletion rates of students served by the eli-
20 gible entity; and

21 “(C) information on the population of stu-
22 dents served by the grant funds, disaggregated
23 by—

24 “(i) part-time or full-time status;

1 “(ii) eligibility to receive the Federal
2 Pell Grant under subpart 1 of part A of
3 title IV of the Higher Education Act of
4 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070a et seq.);

5 “(iii) estimates of eligibility to receive
6 benefits under the supplemental nutrition
7 assistance program established under the
8 Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C.
9 2011 et seq.); and

10 “(iv) dependency status.

11 “(8) DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY.—

12 “(A) CONSULTATION.—In carrying out the
13 program, the Secretary shall consult with eligi-
14 ble entities and State social service agencies.

15 “(B) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—

16 “(i) IN GENERAL.—Not later than
17 120 days after the date of enactment of
18 the Food for Thought Act of 2026, the
19 Secretary, acting through the Adminis-
20 trator of the Food and Nutrition Service,
21 and the Secretary of Education shall enter
22 into a memorandum of understanding
23 that—

24 “(I) authorizes the regular shar-
25 ing of Department of Education data

1 and resources to assist with identi-
2 fying eligible institutions of higher
3 education and low-income students;

4 “(II) contains a plan to assist
5 State social services agencies and
6 State higher education agencies in im-
7 proving outreach to students eligible
8 to enroll in the supplemental nutrition
9 assistance program established under
10 the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008
11 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.); and

12 “(III) requires the development
13 of an annual plan for the Adminis-
14 trator of the Food and Nutrition
15 Service and the Secretary of Edu-
16 cation to provide technical assistance,
17 as applicable, to eligible entities—

18 “(aa) to develop prepared-
19 meal infrastructure;

20 “(bb) to carry out the activi-
21 ties described in paragraph
22 (5)(A), including training the
23 employees of the eligible entity to
24 carry out those activities; and

1 “(cc) to develop outreach to
2 students who are likely to be eli-
3 gible for benefits under the sup-
4 plemental nutrition assistance
5 program established under the
6 Food and Nutrition Act of 2008
7 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.).

8 “(ii) DATA PRIVACY.—Data sharing
9 pursuant to the memorandum of under-
10 standing under clause (i) shall—

11 “(I) comply with all applicable
12 Federal privacy protections, including
13 section 444 of the General Education
14 Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g)
15 (commonly known as the ‘Family
16 Educational Rights and Privacy Act
17 of 1974’); and

18 “(II) be used only for the pur-
19 pose of assisting eligible institutions
20 of higher education in conducting out-
21 reach to low-income students.

22 “(C) NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS.—Not
23 later than 120 days after the date of enactment
24 of the Food for Thought Act of 2026, the Sec-
25 retary shall develop nutritional requirements for

1 meals served pursuant to grants under the pro-
2 gram that are consistent with the goals of the
3 most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans
4 published under section 301 of the National
5 Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act
6 of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 5341).

7 “(D) REPORT.—

8 “(i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary
9 shall submit to Congress—

10 “(I) not later than 2 years after
11 the date of enactment of the Food for
12 Thought Act of 2026, a report evalu-
13 ating the program, including—

14 “(aa) how the program ad-
15 dressed food insecurity; and

16 “(bb) recommendations with
17 respect to expanding the pro-
18 gram; and

19 “(II) not later than 4 years after
20 the date of enactment of the Food for
21 Thought Act of 2026, a report on the
22 effect of the program on retention and
23 completion rates for low-income stu-
24 dents served by the program.

1 “(ii) DISAGGREGATION.—Information
2 contained in the reports submitted under
3 clause (i) shall be disaggregated, where
4 possible, by—

5 “(I) sectors and types of institu-
6 tions of higher education, including
7 whether an institution of higher edu-
8 cation is a minority-serving institu-
9 tion;

10 “(II) the number of eligible stu-
11 dents who—

12 “(aa) are part-time, half-
13 time, or full-time;

14 “(bb) are eligible to receive
15 the Federal Pell Grant under
16 subpart 1 of part A of title IV of
17 that Act (20 U.S.C. 1070a et
18 seq.);

19 “(cc) are eligible to receive
20 benefits under the supplemental
21 nutrition assistance program es-
22 tablished under the Food and
23 Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C.
24 2011 et seq.);

1 “(dd) have indicated that
2 the student or a member of the
3 family of the student previously
4 received benefits under—

5 “(AA) the program de-
6 scribed in item (cc); or

7 “(BB) the temporary
8 assistance for needy families
9 program established under
10 part A of title IV of the So-
11 cial Security Act (42 U.S.C.
12 601 et seq.);

13 “(ee)(AA) reside in an insti-
14 tution or boarding house; or

15 “(BB) live with other indi-
16 viduals and pay compensation to
17 those individuals for meals; and

18 “(ff) are first-generation col-
19 lege students; and

20 “(III) whether an institution of
21 higher education has an open admis-
22 sions policy.

23 “(9) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—
24 There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out

1 this subsection such sums as are necessary for each
2 of fiscal years 2027 through 2032.”.

3 **SEC. 3. AMENDMENT TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT OF**
4 **1965.**

5 Section 480(i) of the Higher Education Act of 1965
6 (20 U.S.C. 1087vv(i)) is amended by adding at the end
7 the following:

8 “(6) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), benefits
9 received under subsection (a) of section 18 of the
10 Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42
11 U.S.C. 1769) shall not be treated as other financial
12 assistance for purposes of section 471(3).”.

○