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HOUSE BILL NO. 629

Offered January 12, 2022

Prefiled January 11, 2022

A BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 23.1-409.1, relating to public institutions of higher education; Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program; established.

 Patron—Roem

 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 23.1-409.1 as follows:****§ 23.1-409.1. Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program.**

A. The Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program (the Program) is established for the purposes of (i) addressing student hunger at public institutions of higher education; (ii) leveraging more sustainable solutions to address basic food needs on campuses of public institutions of higher education; (iii) raising awareness of services offered on campuses at public institutions of higher education to address hunger; 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 B, it shall be designated as a "Hunger-Free Campus" and the Council shall award a grant to 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 hunger at such institution.

B. To receive a "Hunger-Free Campus" designation and receive funding under the Program, a public institution of higher education shall:

1. Establish a student meal plan donation program by which (i) any enrolled student who has purchased a meal plan may donate any meal on such plan to the program and (ii) any enrolled student with demonstrated food insecurity may apply to the program to redeem a donated meal at a meal plan-eligible on-campus dining location in accordance with applicable state health regulations or an institution shall designate a certain amount of its funds for free meal vouchers for students.

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 establish need 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. Each institution shall host at least two on-campus events each academic year that advertise on-campus food pantry services. Notice of the existence of and location of such food pantry shall also be posted in a visible location on the institution's website with contact information for staff members who are involved in running the on-campus food pantry and other efforts to address hunger at the institution.

3. Ensure that all students have access to accurate information about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as well as other available food assistance programs, including eligibility and how to apply, and each institution shall designate an individual who works on campus that students may contact to assist them in learning about and applying for such benefits. Each institution shall also (i) provide SNAP recipients with options to use SNAP benefits to receive food at on-campus dining locations or (ii) provide students with information on establishments in the local surrounding area where they may utilize SNAP benefits.

4. Strive to be a hunger-free campus and shall annually track and publicly report its progress toward achieving this goal in a visible location on its website. In creating such report that shall also be submitted to the Council, each institution shall utilize feedback from a student survey distributed to all students at the institution assessing hunger on campus and include feedback from focus groups.

5. Establish a task force made up of faculty, students, administrators, and other relevant community members to address food insecurity that shall meet no less than three times per academic year. Such task force shall assess the effectiveness of institution actions required pursuant to this section and explore other options to address food insecurity at such institution.

6. 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.

INTRODUCED

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59 2. That the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia shall submit a public report to the
60 Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Education and Health and the House Committee on
61 Education no later than two years after the establishment of the Hunger-Free Campus Grant
62 Program (the Program), established under § 23.1-409.1 of the Code of Virginia, as created by this
63 act. The report shall include (i) the total number and amounts of grant awards, (ii) information
64 about the impact that the Program has had on establishing additional hunger-free campuses at
65 public institutions of higher education and reducing the number of students experiencing food
66 insecurity, and (iii) recommendations regarding the potential establishment of an annual
67 appropriation for the Program.