



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Texas Food Banks Urge Legislators to Fight College Hunger, Improve Graduation Rates**

***38% of students at two-year colleges experience hunger.***

**March 22, 2023 (TEXAS)** –The Feeding Texas network, made up of 21 food banks across the state, is calling on state legislators to address hunger on college campuses today in a virtual day of advocacy.

The inability to afford basic needs is the number one reason cited by community college students for not completing their education. Even with tuition aid, 38% of students at two-year colleges and 29% of students at four-year universities experience hunger, according to a recent #RealCollege survey.

“College students should not have to choose between food and education,” **said Celia Cole, CEO of Feeding Texas.** “The legislature must act to ensure students can access the food assistance they need to finish their degrees and go on to gainful employment.”

Sen. Royce West and Rep. Armando Walle filed companion bills in the Senate ([SB 557](#)) and House ([HB 1501](#)) that would instruct the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to identify college degree programs that are vocational or technical in nature so that students enrolled in these programs can receive SNAP benefits.

“Our workforce depends on students graduating with the skills and training they need to succeed,” Sen. West said. “College tuition costs are rising, and with current inflation, so are the costs of housing, food, and other necessities. Even the price of eggs has skyrocketed to over \$7 a carton. Eliminating hunger on Texas college campuses is critical to ensure our workforce remains strong and our future leaders thrive.”

Though federal policy severely restricts access to SNAP for college students, Congress made changes to guarantee food assistance for more students during the pandemic. However, this policy will expire when the Public Health Emergency ends in May, and thousands of students could lose their SNAP benefits at recertification.

“A simple change in policy would allow low-income students in vocational and technical degree programs to access SNAP while they pursue their educational goals,” Rep. Walle said. “Improving short-term food assistance would help thousands of Texas students along their path to economic self-sufficiency. This legislation is a win-win and makes good business sense for Texas.”

“This bill is the first step in creating a robust skilled labor workforce for Texas, allowing low-income students not having to choose whether to finish their degree or feed their family,” said **Valerie Hawthorne, Ph.D., Director of Government Relations for the North Texas Food Bank**. “HB 1501/SB557 asks Texas HHSC to identify programs or skilled degrees that satisfy SNAP enrollment requirements for low-income students. It's practical and needed for the future of the Texas labor market.”

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*Feeding Texas leads a unified effort for a hunger-free Texas. Learn more and find your local food bank at [www.feedingtexas.org](http://www.feedingtexas.org).*

### **About North Texas Food Bank**

The North Texas Food Bank (NTFB) is a top-ranked nonprofit hunger-relief organization that sources, packages and distributes food through a diverse network of more than 400 feeding partners including food pantries and community organizations across 13 North Texas counties. The organization also provides food to children, seniors and families through various direct-delivery programs, including mobile pantries.

In its last fiscal year, the NTFB provided access to nearly 137 million nutritious meals, a 9% percent increase over the prior year. In response to the ongoing elevated hunger crisis, the organization has launched a \$500 million campaign, Nourish North Texas, to provide more food for today and hope for tomorrow by addressing the barriers to food security that our neighbors face.

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