



Necessity of Student Housing Support

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SUMMARY: This memo seeks to **elevate possible solutions for housing insecurity among college students** to Congress. The issue of housing insecurity can be addressed by increasing financial aid for housing purposes. I propose that Congress advocate for housing support for students enrolled in higher education.

Just over one in three students found themselves housing insecure in the last year. This means they were either living in overcrowded homes, unable to pay rent, having difficulty paying utility bills, or living in homeless shelters or on the street. In California, community college students in particular are facing housing insecurity at alarming rates. Housing is a civil and human rights issue. It is in our best interest as a nation to consider this a problem that urgently needs to be solved.

BACKGROUND: As universities and colleges across the country are facing housing shortages, students are being pressured to seek stable housing outside elsewhere. In some cases, these areas are facing their own affordable housing crisis, forcing students to seek housing in an already tight market. Homelessness has become a major issue for students enrolled in public or private two- and four-year colleges and universities. Currently, nine percent of community college and 12 percent of university students have been homeless in the past year*. In other words, these students have not had a place to live, couch surfed, lived in cars, shelters or abandoned buildings. Students of color are one of the most affected populations with 43 percent of Black and 32 percent of Hispanic students housing insecure within the past year†. There are little to no formal statistics and research on the experiences of DACA and undocumented students facing housing insecurity and homelessness. These students, however, are not eligible for federal financial making them vulnerable to issues like housing insecurity and homelessness.

Housing insecurity can have negative effects on a student's academics and mental health. Students experiencing housing insecurity report missing class and study sessions, opting out of extracurricular activities, and not buying textbooks. These students are also more likely to enroll in remedial classes, like developmental writing and math courses and one in four students facing housing or food insecurity reported

* "Still Hungry and Homeless in College"; <https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Wisconsin-HOPE-Lab-Still-Hungry-and-Homeless.pdf>

† Association of American Colleges and Universities; <https://www.aacu.org/aacu-news/newsletter/facts-figures/jan-feb2017>

dropping a class.* In addition, these students felt that they are not able to engage in the work in class and saw college as worthless.

While there has been general support by universities and state and federal government for students to bring academic success to students, there aren't enough resources that are targeted towards the well-being of students outside of the university setting. In fact, due to increased student enrollment, some universities have gone in the other direction by rolling back affordable student housing policies, now guaranteeing housing for only one year instead of four in some cases.

There are many ways this issue can be addressed by simplifying applications for federal student aid, opening state and federal aid to undocumented and DACA students, and increasing state and federal funding for college students.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- **More funding will be made available to college students experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness.** Universities will be incentivized to provide additional funding to students if they comply with the standards. It will be able to distinguish colleges and universities that are committed to supporting students through their educational career such as an added special designation.
- **Students experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness will have a better college experience.** Students will be able to focus on school without having to worry about missing rent or facing eviction notices. As first-generation students and students of color are most impacted by housing insecurity, this will raise retention among the population.

APPROACH:

1. **Advocate for a simpler FAFSA application.** Students may not rely on their parent's income for additional costs that come with attending an institution of higher education. Students can declare themselves as independents, so their parents' incomes are not considered their own, however, this is complicated. A universal application where students could provide income, current housing status, and a statement describing the circumstances would provide a holistic view for additional funding.
2. **Advocate for additional aid to Undocumented and DACA Students.** Undocumented and DACAmented students are not eligible to receive federal assistance and can become of the most vulnerable to housing insecurity.

* "Hunger on Campus"; http://studentsagainsthunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Hunger_On_Campus.pdf

In some states such as Georgia, public colleges and universities prohibit undocumented students from enrolling. Congress should support legislation, like state and federal Dream Acts, that will make students eligible for state aid that can help ease the cost of higher education. By paying in-state tuition and receiving financial aid, this may help pay for housing. For example, California's Dream Act allocates funds to these students that would otherwise be granted to those applying under FAFSA.

3. **Advocate for more state and federal funding for students.** Congress should support initiatives that address housing insecurity among students. Currently, the state of Massachusetts has allocated \$120,000 to cover housing for 20 college and university students*. By recommending state legislatures or Congress fund similar projects, it will help students succeed at the university level. At the federal level, congress should support an increase in Pell grants. Title IV of the Higher Education Act administers these grants which could be used for housing costs. Historically, Pell grants funded 79% of the cost to attend a public four-year institution, now they cover just under 20%. It would be greatly beneficial to many students if these were increased.

* "State Will Offer Dorm Rooms for Homeless College Students"; <https://www.uml.edu/news/news-articles/2019/globe-homeless-students.aspx>