

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

H.B. 4571  
By: Bucy  
Higher Education  
Committee Report (Unamended)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

A constituent expressed concern about the level of food insecurity faced by many students at postsecondary institutions in Texas. According to a report by The University of Texas Student Government's Food Insecurity Action Team in 2022, around one in three students at UT Austin experienced food insecurity, with more than half of those being first-generation college students. A 2021 National College Health Assessment reported a similar figure as the national average for college and university students with food insecurity.

Many first-time college students struggle with an abrupt change to managing their own life, routines, study habits, social life, and nutrition. Students also face limited options on college campuses in terms of fulfilling their nutritional needs, with few campuses having easily accessible grocery stores for students and most campuses having dining halls and fast food restaurants, many of which can be expensive and unhealthy. This combination of food insecurity and the stress of college can adversely affect academic performance, physical well-being, and mental health. H.B. 4571 seeks to establish a hunger-free campus program and sets out criteria for an institution of higher education to be designated as a hunger-free campus by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The bill also provides for the establishment of a task force to develop guidelines and best practices for addressing student hunger on institution campuses, among other provisions.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission in SECTION 3 of this bill.

### **ANALYSIS**

H.B. 4571 amends the Education Code to require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish and administer a hunger-free campus program to support institutions of higher education in establishing essential and sustainable solutions to hunger at institution campuses in Texas. The bill requires the solutions to include the following:

- allowing students to donate meal credits from the student's meal plan to be distributed to peers who may be facing food insecurity;
- establishing food pantries on campus; and
- developing, in collaboration with the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), capacity-building strategies for increasing student enrollment in SNAP.

The bill requires the THECB to establish criteria under which the THECB may designate an institution campus as a hunger-free campus if the campus applies and meets the qualifications.

The bill authorizes the THECB to establish a task force to develop best practices guidelines for addressing student hunger on institution campuses, including methods for implementing the solutions to hunger.

H.B. 4571 requires a food vendor contract between a public institution of higher education and a person to sell or otherwise provide food on the institution's campus to require the person, if eligible, to seek authorization to become a retailer and accept SNAP benefits. This requirement applies only to a contract entered into on or after the bill's effective date.

H.B. 4571 amends the Human Resources Code to require HHSC, as authorized under federal law, to provide an exemption from work requirements to provide SNAP benefits to an individual who is ineligible to receive SNAP benefits based solely on the applicable work requirements and who is enrolled as a student in a public, private, or independent institution of higher education or a career school or college. The bill requires the executive commissioner of HHSC, not later than December 31, 2024, to adopt rules to implement the exemption, including rules that ensure a student remains eligible for SNAP benefits during a break in the semester or academic term of the postsecondary educational institution in which the student is enrolled. These provisions apply only to an initial determination or recertification of SNAP eligibility that is made on or after the bill's effective date.

H.B. 4571 provides for the delayed implementation of any provision for which an applicable state agency determines a federal waiver or authorization is necessary for implementation until the waiver or authorization is requested and granted.

**EFFECTIVE DATE**

September 1, 2023.