

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1664

To require the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy to develop a consistent set of policy guidelines for Federal research agencies to address financial instability of graduate researchers and postdoctoral researchers, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 7, 2025

Mr. PADILLA (for himself and Mr. MORAN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To require the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy to develop a consistent set of policy guidelines for Federal research agencies to address financial instability of graduate researchers and postdoctoral researchers, 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,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Relieving Economic
5 Strain to Enhance American Resilience and Competitive-
6 ness in Higher Education and Research Act” or the “RE-
7 SEARCHER Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. POLICY GUIDELINES FOR FEDERAL RESEARCH**
2 **AGENCIES TO ADDRESS FINANCIAL INSTA-**
3 **BILITY OF GRADUATE RESEARCHERS AND**
4 **POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS.**

5 (a) DEFINITION.—In this section:

6 (1) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The
7 term “institution of higher education” has the
8 meaning given such term in section 101 of the High-
9 er Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

10 (2) GRADUATE RESEARCHERS.—The term
11 “graduate researchers” means individuals enrolled in
12 a degree program leading to an advanced degree who
13 receive stipends or other compensation to conduct
14 research in any discipline at an institution of higher
15 education that is a recipient of Federal funding.

16 (3) POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS.—The term
17 “postdoctoral researchers” means individuals in
18 training-focused positions who have received a doc-
19 toral degree or equivalent and receive stipends or
20 other compensation to conduct research in any dis-
21 cipline at an institution of higher education that is
22 a recipient of Federal funding.

23 (b) OSTP GUIDELINES.—

24 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 6 months
25 after the date of enactment of this Act, the Director
26 of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, in

1 consultation with the National Science and Tech-
2 nology Council, the Committee on Science, Tech-
3 nology, Engineering, and Math Education of the Na-
4 tional Science and Technology Council, the Presi-
5 dent's Council of Advisors on Science and Tech-
6 nology, institutions of higher education, graduate
7 and postdoctoral organizations, and other relevant
8 stakeholders, shall develop a consistent set of policy
9 guidelines for Federal research agencies to address
10 financial instability of graduate researchers and
11 postdoctoral researchers.

12 (2) REQUIREMENTS.—In developing the policy
13 guidelines under paragraph (1), the Director of the
14 Office of Science and Technology Policy shall include
15 guidelines that address, to the extent practicable, the
16 following:

17 (A) Opportunities to increase stipends for
18 graduate researchers and postdoctoral research-
19 ers, including indexing based on location.

20 (B) An additional consideration for in-
21 creasing stipends for postdoctoral researchers
22 conducting research in rural or underserved
23 areas, or in States eligible to receive funding
24 from the Established Program to Stimulate
25 Competitive Research under section 113 of the

1 National Science Foundation Authorization Act
2 of 1988 (42 U.S.C. 1862g), to support the re-
3 cruitment and retention of researchers in such
4 regions.

5 (C) Opportunities to increase access to
6 quality, affordable medical, dental, and vision
7 care.

8 (D) Opportunities to increase access to af-
9 fordable housing and transportation.

10 (E) Opportunities to reduce food insecu-
11 rity.

12 (F) Opportunities to address costs of car-
13 ing for family members, including child care.

14 (3) APPLICATION.—

15 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the Of-
16 fice of Science and Technology Policy shall en-
17 courage and monitor efforts of Federal research
18 agencies to develop and implement policies
19 based on the policy guidelines under paragraph
20 (1).

21 (B) FEDERAL RESEARCH AGENCY IMPLE-
22 MENTATION.—Not later than 6 months after
23 receiving the policy guidelines under paragraph
24 (1), the head of each Federal research agency
25 shall—

1 (i) develop and implement policies
2 with respect to financial instability of grad-
3 uate researchers and postdoctoral research-
4 ers that are consistent with such policy
5 guidelines; and

6 (ii) broadly disseminate such policies
7 to current and potential recipients of re-
8 search and development awards made by
9 such agency.

10 (4) UPDATES.—The Director of the Office of
11 Science and Technology Policy shall update the pol-
12 icy guidelines under paragraph (1) as the Director
13 determines necessary.

14 (5) REPORT.—Not later than 1 year after the
15 date after the guidelines are submitted and every 5
16 years thereafter, the Director of the Office of
17 Science and Technology Policy shall submit to the
18 Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transpor-
19 tation and the Committee on Health, Education,
20 Labor, and Pensions of the Senate and the Com-
21 mittee on Science, Space, and Technology, the Com-
22 mittee on Education and Workforce, and Committee
23 on Energy and Commerce of the House of Rep-
24 resentatives, a report containing information relating
25 to the following:

1 (A) The policy guidelines under paragraph
2 (1).

3 (B) Progress on the implementation of
4 such guidelines by Federal research agencies.

5 (c) DATA COLLECTION.—The Research and Develop-
6 ment, Competition, and Innovation Act (42 U.S.C. 18901
7 et seq.) is amended—

8 (1) in section 10314(b)—

9 (A) in paragraph (2)—

10 (i) in subparagraph (D), by striking
11 “and” after the semicolon;

12 (ii) by redesignating subparagraph
13 (E) as subparagraph (F); and

14 (iii) by inserting after subparagraph
15 (D) the following new subparagraph:

16 “(E) graduate researcher and postdoctoral
17 researcher stipend amounts and financial insta-
18 bility (disaggregated, to the extent practicable,
19 by demographics); and”; and

20 (B) by adding at the end the following new
21 paragraph:

22 “(5) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

23 “(A) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDU-
24 CATION.—The term ‘institution of higher edu-
25 cation’ has the meaning given such term in sec-

1 tion 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965
2 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

3 “(B) GRADUATE RESEARCHERS.—The
4 term ‘graduate researchers’ means individuals
5 enrolled in a degree program leading to an ad-
6 vanced degree who receive stipends or other
7 compensation to conduct research in any dis-
8 cipline at an institution of higher education
9 that is a recipient of Federal funding.

10 “(C) POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS.—The
11 term ‘postdoctoral researchers’ means individ-
12 uals in training-focused positions who have re-
13 ceived a doctoral degree or equivalent and re-
14 ceive stipends or other compensation to conduct
15 research in any discipline at an institution of
16 higher education that is a recipient of Federal
17 funding.”; and

18 (2) in paragraph (1) of section 10502(a), by in-
19 serting “graduate and postdoctoral research stipend
20 amounts (disaggregated, to the extent practicable,
21 by demographics),” before “and awarded budget”.

22 (d) DATA ON FINANCIAL INSTABILITY OF GRADUATE
23 RESEARCHERS AND POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS.—
24 The Director of the National Science Foundation shall
25 make awards, on a competitive basis, to institutions of

1 higher education or nonprofit organizations (or consortia
 2 of such institutions or organizations) to collect and ana-
 3 lyze data on financial instability of graduate researchers
 4 and postdoctoral researchers (disaggregated, to the extent
 5 practicable, by demographics).

6 (e) NATIONAL ACADEMIES ASSESSMENT.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 2 years after
 8 the date of enactment of this Act, the Director of
 9 the National Science Foundation shall enter into an
 10 agreement with the National Academies of Sciences,
 11 Engineering, and Medicine to undertake a study and
 12 issue a report on the status of financial instability
 13 of graduate researchers and postdoctoral research-
 14 ers. To the extent feasible, the study shall include an
 15 assessment (disaggregated, to the extent practicable,
 16 by demographics) at a minimum of the immediately
 17 preceding 5 years of the following:

18 (A) Stipends relative to average local med-
 19 ical, dental, and vision expenses.

20 (B) Stipends relative to average local hous-
 21 ing and transportation costs.

22 (C) Stipends relative to average local food
 23 costs.

1 (D) Stipends relative to average local costs
2 of caring for family members, including child
3 care costs.

4 (2) REPORT.—Not later than 2 years after the
5 date on which the agreement between the Director
6 of the National Science Foundation and the Na-
7 tional Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Med-
8 icine is entered into pursuant to paragraph (1), the
9 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and
10 Medicine shall submit to the Committee on Com-
11 merce, Science, and Transportation and the Com-
12 mittee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
13 of the Senate and the Committee on Science, Space,
14 and Technology, the Committee on Education and
15 Workforce, and the Committee on Energy and Com-
16 merce of the House of Representatives a report con-
17 taining the results of the assessment under such
18 paragraph and recommendations relating thereto re-
19 garding how Federal agencies, Congress, institutions
20 of higher education, and other relevant entities may
21 address financial instability of graduate researchers
22 and postdoctoral researchers.

23 (f) GAO STUDY.—Not later than 3 years after the
24 date of enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General
25 of the United States shall submit to the Committee on

1 Commerce, Science, and Transportation and the Com-
2 mittee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the
3 Senate and the Committee on Science, Space, and Tech-
4 nology, the Committee on Education and Workforce, and
5 the Committee on Energy and Commerce of the House
6 of Representatives a report that—

7 (1) assesses the degree to which Federal re-
8 search agencies have implemented the policy guide-
9 lines under subsection (b) and the effectiveness of
10 such implementation;

11 (2) includes recommendations on potential
12 changes to practices and policies to improve such
13 guidelines and such implementation; and

14 (3) includes recommendations on additional
15 data collection and research needed to monitor
16 progress on reducing financial instability of graduate
17 researchers and postdoctoral researchers.

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