

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4002

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 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 12, 2023

Mrs. McCLELLAN (for herself, Ms. TLAIB, Mr. KILMER, Ms. LEE of Pennsylvania, Ms. TOKUDA, Ms. MCCOLLUM, Ms. CARAVEO, Mr. SARBANES, Mr. GREEN of Texas, and Mr. GRIJALVA) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

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-

1 ness in Higher Education and Research Act” or the “RE-
2 SEARCHER Act”.

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

7 (a) DEFINITION.—In this section:

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

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

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

25 (b) OSTP GUIDELINES.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than six months
2 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Di-
3 rector of the Office of Science and Technology Pol-
4 icy, in consultation with the National Science and
5 Technology Council, the Committee on STEM Edu-
6 cation, PCAST, institutions of higher education,
7 graduate and postdoctoral organizations, and other
8 relevant stakeholders, shall develop a consistent set
9 of policy guidelines for Federal research agencies to
10 address financial instability of graduate researchers
11 and 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 and
20 accounting for cost of living adjustments.

21 (B) Opportunities to increase access to
22 quality, affordable medical, dental, and vision
23 care.

24 (C) Opportunities to increase access to af-
25 fordable housing and transportation.

1 (D) Opportunities to reduce food insecu-
2 rity.

3 (E) Opportunities to address costs of car-
4 ing for family members, including child care.

5 (3) APPLICATION.—

6 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the Of-
7 fice of Science and Technology Policy shall en-
8 courage and monitor efforts of Federal research
9 agencies to develop and implement policies
10 based on the policy guidelines under paragraph
11 (1).

12 (B) FEDERAL RESEARCH AGENCY IMPLE-
13 MENTATION.—Not later than six months after
14 receiving the policy guidelines under paragraph
15 (1), the head of each Federal research agency
16 shall—

17 (i) develop and implement policies
18 with respect to financial instability of grad-
19 uate researchers and postdoctoral research-
20 ers that are consistent with such policy
21 guidelines; and

22 (ii) broadly disseminate such policies
23 to current and potential recipients of re-
24 search and development awards made by
25 such agency.

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

5 (5) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the
6 date after the guidelines are submitted and every
7 five years thereafter, the Director of the Office of
8 Science and Technology Policy shall submit to the
9 Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, the
10 Committee on Education and the Workforce, and
11 the Committee on Energy and Commerce of the
12 House of Representatives and the Committee on
13 Commerce, Science, and Transportation and the
14 Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pen-
15 sions of the Senate a report containing information
16 relating to the following:

17 (A) The policy guidelines under paragraph
18 (1).

19 (B) Progress on the implementation of
20 such guidelines by Federal research agencies.

21 (c) DATA COLLECTION.—The Research and Develop-
22 ment, Competition, and Innovation Act (enacted as divi-
23 sion B of Public Law 117–167) is amended—

24 (1) in section 10314(b) (42 U.S.C. 18994)—

25 (A) in paragraph (2)—

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

3 (ii) by redesignating subparagraph
4 (E) as subparagraph (F); and

5 (iii) by inserting after subparagraph
6 (D) the following new subparagraph:

7 “(E) graduate researcher and postdoctoral
8 researcher stipend amounts and financial insta-
9 bility (disaggregated, to the extent practicable,
10 by demographics); and”;

11 (B) by adding at the end the following new
12 paragraph:

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

14 “(A) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDU-
15 CATION.—The term ‘institution of higher edu-
16 cation’ has the meaning given such term in sec-
17 tion 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965
18 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

19 “(B) GRADUATE RESEARCHERS.—The
20 term ‘graduate researchers’ means individuals
21 enrolled in a degree program leading to an ad-
22 vanced degree who receive stipends or other
23 compensation to conduct research in any dis-
24 cipline at an institution of higher education
25 that is a recipient of Federal funding.

1 “(C) POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS.—The
2 term ‘postdoctoral researchers’ means individ-
3 uals in training-focused positions who have re-
4 ceived a doctoral degree or equivalent and re-
5 ceive stipends or other compensation to conduct
6 research in any discipline at an institution of
7 higher education that is a recipient of Federal
8 funding.”; and

9 (2) in paragraph (1) of section 10502(a) (42
10 U.S.C. 19152(a)), by inserting “graduate and
11 postdoctoral research stipend amounts
12 (disaggregated, to the extent practicable, by demo-
13 graphics),” before “and awarded budget”.

14 (d) DATA ON FINANCIAL INSTABILITY OF GRADUATE
15 RESEARCHERS AND POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS.—
16 The Director of the National Science Foundation shall
17 make awards, on a competitive basis, to institutions of
18 higher education or nonprofit organizations (or consortia
19 of such institutions or organizations) to collect and ana-
20 lyze data on financial instability of graduate researchers
21 and postdoctoral researchers (disaggregated, to the extent
22 practicable, by demographics).

23 (e) NATIONAL ACADEMIES ASSESSMENT.—

24 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than two years
25 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Di-

1 rector of the National Science Foundation shall
2 enter into an agreement with the National Acad-
3 emies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to un-
4 dertake a study and issue a report on the status of
5 financial instability of graduate researchers and
6 postdoctoral researchers. To the extent feasible, the
7 study shall include an assessment (disaggregated, to
8 the extent practicable, by demographics) at a min-
9 imum of the immediately preceding five years of the
10 following:

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

13 (B) Stipends relative to average local hous-
14 ing and transportation costs.

15 (C) Stipends relative to average local food
16 costs.

17 (D) Stipends relative to average local costs
18 of caring for family members, including child
19 care costs.

20 (2) REPORT.—Not later than two years after
21 the date on which the agreement between the Direc-
22 tor of the National Science Foundation and the Na-
23 tional Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Med-
24 icine is entered into pursuant to paragraph (1), the
25 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and

1 Medicine shall submit to Committee on Science,
2 Space, and Technology, the Committee on Education
3 and the Workforce, and the Committee on Energy
4 and Commerce of the House of Representatives and
5 the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Trans-
6 portation and the Committee on Health, Education,
7 Labor, and Pensions of the Senate a report con-
8 taining the results of the assessment under such
9 paragraph and recommendations relating thereto re-
10 garding how Federal agencies, Congress, institutions
11 of higher education, and other relevant entities may
12 address financial instability of graduate researchers
13 and postdoctoral researchers.

14 (f) GAO STUDY.—Not later than three years after
15 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller
16 General of the United States shall submit to the Com-
17 mittee on Science, Space, and Technology, the Committee
18 on Education and the Workforce, and the Committee on
19 Energy and Commerce of the House of Representatives
20 and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transpor-
21 tation and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
22 and Pensions of the Senate a report that—

23 (1) assesses the degree to which Federal re-
24 search agencies have implemented the policy guide-

1 lines under subsection (b) and the effectiveness of
2 such implementation;

3 (2) includes recommendations on potential
4 changes to practices and policies to improve such
5 guidelines and such implementation; and

6 (3) includes recommendations on additional
7 data collection and research needed to monitor
8 progress on reducing financial instability of graduate
9 researchers and postdoctoral researchers.

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