H. R. 118th Congress
1st Session

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

Ms. McCLELLAN introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on __________________________

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.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Relieving Economic Strain to Enhance American Resilience and Competitive-
ness in Higher Education and Research Act” or the “RESEARCHER Act”.

SEC. 2. POLICY GUIDELINES FOR FEDERAL RESEARCH AGENCIES TO ADDRESS FINANCIAL INSTABILITY OF GRADUATE RESEARCHERS AND POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS.

(a) DEFINITION.—In this section:

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

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

(3) POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS.—The term “postdoctoral researchers” means individuals in training-focused positions who have received a doctoral degree or equivalent and receive stipends or other compensation to conduct research in any discipline at an institution of higher education that is a recipient of Federal funding.

(b) OSTP GUIDELINES.—
(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than six months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, in consultation with the National Science and Technology Council, the Committee on STEM Education, PCAST, institutions of higher education, graduate and postdoctoral organizations, and other relevant stakeholders, shall develop a consistent set of policy guidelines for Federal research agencies to address financial instability of graduate researchers and postdoctoral researchers.

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

(A) Opportunities to increase stipends for graduate researchers and postdoctoral researchers, including indexing based on location and accounting for cost of living adjustments.

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

(C) Opportunities to increase access to affordable housing and transportation.
(D) Opportunities to reduce food insecurity.

(E) Opportunities to address costs of caring for family members, including child care.

(3) APPLICATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy shall encourage and monitor efforts of Federal research agencies to develop and implement policies based on the policy guidelines under paragraph (1).

(B) FEDERAL RESEARCH AGENCY IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than six months after receiving the policy guidelines under paragraph (1), the head of each Federal research agency shall—

(i) develop and implement policies with respect to financial instability of graduate researchers and postdoctoral researchers that are consistent with such policy guidelines; and

(ii) broadly disseminate such policies to current and potential recipients of research and development awards made by such agency.
5

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

(5) Report.—Not later than one year after the
date after the guidelines are submitted and every
five years thereafter, the Director of the Office of
Science and Technology Policy shall submit to the
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, the
Committee on Education and Workforce, and the
Committee on Energy and Commerce of the House
of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation and the Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Sen-
ate a report containing information relating to the
following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“(E) graduate researcher and postdoctoral researcher stipend amounts and financial instability (disaggregated, to the extent practicable, by demographics); and”; and

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

“(5) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

“(A) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The term ‘institution of higher education’ has the meaning given such term in section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

“(B) GRADUATE RESEARCHERS.—The term ‘graduate researchers’ means individuals enrolled in a degree program leading to an advanced degree who receive stipends or other compensation to conduct research in any discipline at an institution of higher education that is a recipient of Federal funding.
“(C) Postdoctoral Researchers.—The term ‘postdoctoral researchers’ means individuals in training-focused positions who have received a doctoral degree or equivalent and receive stipends or other compensation to conduct research in any discipline at an institution of higher education that is a recipient of Federal funding.”; and

(2) in paragraph (1) of section 10502(a) (42 U.S.C. 19152(a)), by inserting “graduate and postdoctoral research stipend amounts (disaggregated, to the extent practicable, by demographics),” before “and awarded budget”.

(d) Data on Financial Instability of Graduate Researchers and Postdoctoral Researchers.—The Director of the National Science Foundation shall make awards, on a competitive basis, to institutions of higher education or nonprofit organizations (or consortia of such institutions or organizations) to collect and analyze data on financial instability of graduate researchers and postdoctoral researchers (disaggregated, to the extent practicable, by demographics).

(e) National Academies Assessment.—

(1) In General.—Not later than two years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Di-
rector of the National Science Foundation shall enter into an agreement with the National Acad-
emies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to un-
dertake a study and issue a report on the status of financial instability of graduate researchers and postdoctoral researchers. To the extent feasible, the study shall include an assessment (disaggregated, to the extent practicable, by demographics) at a mini-
imum of the immediately preceding five years of the following:

(A) Stipends relative to average local medical, dental, and vision expenses.

(B) Stipends relative to average local housing and transportation costs.

(C) Stipends relative to average local food costs.

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

(2) REPORT.—Not later than two years after the date on which the agreement between the Direc-
tor of the National Science Foundation and the Na-
tional Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medi-
icine is entered into pursuant to paragraph (1), the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and
Medicine shall submit to Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, the Committee on Education and Workforce, and the Committee on Energy and Commerce of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate a report containing the results of the assessment under such paragraph and recommendations relating thereto regarding how Federal agencies, Congress, institutions of higher education, and other relevant entities may address financial instability of graduate researchers and postdoctoral researchers.

(f) GAO Study.—Not later than three years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, the Committee on Education and Workforce, and the Committee on Energy and Commerce of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate a report that—

(1) assesses the degree to which Federal research agencies have implemented the policy guide-
(2) includes recommendations on potential changes to practices and policies to improve such guidelines and such implementation; and

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