

RESEARCHER ACT

Relieving Economic Strain to Enhance American Resilience & Competitiveness in Higher Education & Research

FINANCIAL INSTABILITY IN THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY

United States leadership in science and innovation depends on maintaining a robust research workforce. However, the graduate students and postdoctoral fellows who play an essential role in advancing research too often struggle with financial instability due to the rising costs of healthcare, housing, transportation, food, childcare, and other expenses.

Over 95 percent of graduate researchers recently surveyed reported worrying about the increasing costs of living. In another survey, almost 95 percent of postdoctoral researchers indicated that their professional and personal lives were most negatively affected by their salary. These financial stresses deter talented students from pursuing research careers, exacerbating the STEM workforce shortage and harming our competitiveness on the global stage.

Furthermore, low research stipends and a lack of comprehensive benefits disproportionately impact researchers from lower-income families who lack a safety net. This exacerbates disparities in who is able to participate in scientific research and hampers efforts to develop a diverse workforce representative of America.

THE SOLUTION

The RESEARCHER Act would help ensure that graduate and postdoctoral researchers have the resources and financial stability they need to continue their critical work. Specifically, it:

- Directs the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to develop a set of policy guidelines for Federal research agencies to address the financial instability of graduate and postdoctoral researchers;
- Requires Federal research agencies to develop and implement policies based on the guidelines developed by OSTP;
- Amends the CHIPS and Science Act to supplement data collection on the financial instability of graduate and postdoctoral researchers and allows the National Science Foundation to award grants to research this issue;
- Commissions a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine study on the status of financial instability of graduate and postdoctoral researchers; and
- Directs the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study on the implementation of the guidelines developed by OSTP at Federal research agencies.

ENDORSEMENTS

The RESEARCHER Act is endorsed by the American Association of Immunologists, American Geophysical Union, American Mathematical Society, American Physical Society, Association for Women in Science, MIT Graduate Student Council, National Postdoctoral Association, and University of California System.

1) https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/Nature_Careers_Graduate_Survey_2022/21277575/3

2) <https://www.nationalpostdoc.org/news/625875/NPA-Releases-2023-Postdoctoral-Barriers-to-Success.htm>