

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

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LOW-INCOME STUDENT ASSISTANCE MUST BE IMPROVED

Mr. Speaker. Today I am introducing legislation which would amend the Food Stamp Act of 1977 to exclude from household income the actual and reasonable expenses incurred by household members of books and transportation incidental to attending school.

As the current law reads, educational loans on which payment is deferred, grants, scholarships, fellowships, veterans' educational benefits, and the like -- to the extent that they are used for tuition and mandatory school fees -- are excluded as income, and therefore do not detract from food stamp aid that a family may be receiving.

By definition, mandatory school fees are those charged to all students or those charged to all students within a certain curriculum. For example, uniforms, lab fees, or equipment charged to all students to enroll in a chemistry course would be considered mandatory school fees, and thus would be excluded as income. However, transportation, supplies, and textbook expenses which are not uniformly charged to all students, would not be considered mandatory school fees, and thus -- as income -- would limit food stamps available to the family.

Anyone who has attended an educational facility where books need be purchased or rented knows the tremendous cost that this can incur within a short period of time. This is especially true in institutions of higher education where anywhere from one to fifteen texts may be required for one course. While utilization of the school library may be substituted for purchase in a few of these cases, such a recourse is not always advisable or possible.

It is necessary in many instances for the student to purchase the text(s) required to take full advantage of the course. However, when money received to pay for the purchase of those books detracts from aid to the family, it becomes necessary for either the student's education or the family's welfare to be compromised.

Therefore, because the intent of the Food Stamp Act was and is to aid the needy, I urge my colleagues to join me in eradicating this

educational barrier to America's underprivileged youth. My bill will exclude book purchase and rental costs -- in addition to reasonable transportation costs -- as income. Since the Food Stamp Act stipulates that the receipt of food stamps be based on household members only, the transportation costs in my bill would be commuter fees, not transportation to or from an educational facility at which the student was planning to live while attending school. This bill should alleviate much of the burden that has been placed on the family, without excluding unreasonable transportation costs as income.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the intent behind the Food Stamp Act was to penalize needy families for educational opportunities which their children may receive. If we allow this unfortunate circumstance to continue, we are undermining the chance for many individuals to become self-supporting through opportunities that are provided by a good education. I invite my colleagues to join me in this effort to alleviate some of the burden which has been placed on many needy American families, thus providing America's underprivileged youth the hope to work for a better tomorrow.