

ALEX PADILLA

U.S. SENATOR  for CALIFORNIA

Relieving Economic Strain to Enhance American Resilience & Competitiveness in Higher Education & Research (RESEARCHER) Act

To ensure American competitiveness in a 21st Century scientific and technological environment, we must strengthen the workforce that advances scientific discoveries and technological innovations. This scientific workforce is fueled by our graduate and postdoctoral researchers, but these young researchers face significant financial stressors — including food insecurity, student loan debt, housing costs, and child care costs — that threaten to cause many of them to drop out of the STEM pipeline entirely.

The bipartisan RESEARCHER Act will bolster U.S. leadership in STEM by requiring federal research agencies to address the financial insecurity of graduate and postdoctoral researchers, while commissioning studies to better understand the landscape of financial insecurity for these researchers.

What the bill does

- Requires Federal research agencies to implement policies to address the financial instability of graduate and postdoctoral researchers based on policy guidelines developed by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.
- Increases data collection on the financial instability of graduate and postdoctoral researchers by amending the CHIPS and Science Act and directing the National Science Foundation to award institutions of higher education and nonprofit organizations with grants to research the subject.
- Commissions a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine study on the status of graduate and postdoctoral researcher financial insecurity.
- Directs the Government Accountability Office to report on the implementation of the guidelines enacted by Federal research agencies and make recommendations to improve said guidelines.

Why the RESEARCHER Act is needed

- In the 2023 “Postdoctoral Barriers to Success” survey administered by the American Postdoctoral Association, postdocs responded that their professional or personal lives were most negatively impacted by their salary. 95% of postdocs reported their salaries as a problem, and 85% indicated that a lack of benefits was a negative element impacting their careers.¹
- As a primary concern for the next generation of America’s scientific enterprise, financial insecurity must be addressed to secure the future of American innovation.

Endorsed by: American Physical Society, American Geophysical Union, American Mathematical Association, National Postdoctoral Association, Association for Women in Science, American Association of Immunologists, University of California, California State University, and the MIT Student Graduate Council.

¹ https://www.nationalpostdoc.org/resource/resmgr/docs/2023_Postdoctoral_Barriers_t.pdf