

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1558

To require a standard financial aid offer form, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 1, 2025

Mr. GRASSLEY (for himself, Ms. SMITH, Ms. HASSAN, and Mr. TUBERVILLE)
introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To require a standard financial aid offer form, 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 “Understanding the
5 True Cost of College Act of 2025”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINANCIAL AID OFFER FORM.**

7 Section 484 of the Higher Education Opportunity
8 Act (20 U.S.C. 1092 note) is amended to read as follows:

1 **“SEC. 484. FINANCIAL AID OFFER FORM.**

2 “(a) STANDARD FORM AND TERMINOLOGY.—The
3 Secretary of Education, in consultation with the heads of
4 relevant Federal agencies, shall develop standard termi-
5 nology and a standard form for financial aid offers based
6 on recommendations from representatives of students, vet-
7 erans, servicemembers, students’ families, institutions of
8 higher education (including community colleges, for-profit
9 institutions, 4-year public institutions, and 4-year private
10 nonprofit institutions), financial aid experts, secondary
11 school and postsecondary counselors, college access profes-
12 sionals, nonprofit organizations, and consumer groups.

13 “(b) KEY REQUIRED CONTENTS FOR AID OFFER.—
14 The standard form developed pursuant to subsection (a)
15 shall be titled ‘Financial Aid Offer’ and shall include the
16 following items in a consumer-friendly manner that is sim-
17 ple and understandable, with costs listed first followed by
18 grants and scholarships, clearly separated from each other
19 with separate headings:

20 “(1) COST INFORMATION.—

21 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Information on the
22 student’s estimated cost of attendance, includ-
23 ing the following:

24 “(i) DIRECT COSTS.—The total cost of
25 all items described in section 472 of the
26 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.

1087ll) that are billed to the student by the institution or otherwise required by the institution for enrollment, including such total cost disaggregated by the cost of each such item, including, as determined under such section—

“(I) tuition and fees (and other required expenses); and

“(II) housing and food for a student participating in institutionally owned or operated food services or institutionally owned or operated housing.

“(ii) INDIRECT COSTS.—The total cost of all items described in section 472 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087ll) that are not billed to the student by the institution or otherwise required by the institution for enrollment, including such total cost disaggregated by the cost of each such item, including, as determined under such section—

“(I) the component totals each for housing and food costs for stu-

1 dents who reside off-campus or off
2 campus with family;

3 “(II) books, supplies, equipment,
4 course materials, and rental or pur-
5 chase of a personal computer; and

6 “(III) transportation.

7 “(B) ACADEMIC PERIOD.—The academic
8 period covered by the Financial Aid Offer, and
9 an explanation that the amount of financial aid
10 offered may change—

11 “(i) for academic periods not covered
12 by the Financial Aid Offer; or

13 “(ii) by program.

14 “(C) ENROLLMENT STATUS.—An indica-
15 tion of whether cost and aid estimates are
16 based on full-time or part-time enrollment.

17 “(D) ESTIMATED OR SET.—An indication,
18 as applicable, about whether the tuition and
19 fees are estimated based on the previous year,
20 or are set, for the academic period indicated in
21 accordance with subparagraph (B).

22 “(2) GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS.—The aggre-
23 gate amount of grants and scholarships, differen-
24 tiated by source, that the student does not have to
25 repay, such as grant aid offered under title IV of the

1 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070 et
2 seq.) and grant aid offered through other Federal
3 programs, grant and scholarship aid offered by the
4 institution, grant and scholarship aid offered by the
5 State, and, if known, grant and scholarship aid from
6 an outside source to the student for such academic
7 period, including—

8 “(A) a disclosure that the grants and
9 scholarships do not have to be repaid; and

10 “(B) if institutional aid is included—

11 “(i) the conditions under which the
12 student can expect to receive similar
13 amounts of such financial aid for each aca-
14 demic period the student is enrolled at the
15 institution; and

16 “(ii) whether the institutional aid
17 offer may change if grants or scholarships
18 from outside sources are applied after the
19 student receives the Financial Aid Offer,
20 and, if applicable, how that aid will
21 change.

22 “(3) NET PRICE.—

23 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The net price that the
24 student, or the student’s family on behalf of the
25 student, is estimated to have to pay for the stu-

dent to attend the institution for such academic period, equal to—

“(i) the cost of attendance as described in paragraph (1)(A) for the student for the period indicated in paragraph (1)(B); minus

“(ii) the amount of grant and scholarship aid described in paragraph (2) that is included in the Financial Aid Offer.

“(B) DISCLOSURE.—A disclosure that the net price is an estimate of the total expenses for the year and not equivalent to the amount the student will owe directly to the institution.

“(4) LOANS.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Information on any loan under part D of title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087a et seq.; 20 U.S.C. 1087aa et seq.) (except a Federal Direct PLUS Loan under part D of that Act) that the institution recommends for the student for the academic period covered by the Financial Aid Offer, which shall be made—

“(i) with clear use of the word ‘loan’ to describe the recommended loan amounts; and

1 “(ii) with clear labeling of subsidized
2 and unsubsidized loans.

3 “(B) DISCLOSURE ON REPAYMENT.—A
4 disclosure that such loans have to be repaid and
5 a disclosure that the student can borrow a less-
6 er or, if applicable, greater amount than the
7 recommended loan amount.

8 “(C) DISCLOSURE ON INTEREST RATES
9 AND FEES.—A disclosure that the interest rates
10 and fees on such loans are set annually and af-
11 fect total cost over time, and a link to a De-
12 partment of Education website that includes
13 current information on interest rates and fees.

14 “(D) LINK TO REPAYMENT CALCU-
15 LATOR.—A link to the Department of Edu-
16 cation’s repayment calculator website for stu-
17 dents with instruction that this website contains
18 customizable estimates of expected repayment
19 costs under different loan repayment plans.

20 “(5) PROCESS FOR ACCEPTING, ADJUSTING, OR
21 DECLINING AID AND NEXT STEPS.—

22 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The deadlines and a
23 summary of the process (including the next
24 steps) for—

1 “(i) accepting the financial aid of-
2 fered;

3 “(ii) adjusting the amount of financial
4 aid offered; and

5 “(iii) declining the financial aid of-
6 fered.

7 “(B) INFORMATION ON PAYING COSTS.—
8 Information on when and how costs described
9 in paragraph (1)(A)(i) must be paid, including
10 a clear indication of whether such cost is re-
11 quired or optional for the student.

12 “(C) DISCLOSURE ON VERIFICATION OF
13 INFORMATION.—A disclosure that verification
14 of information provided on the Free Application
15 for Federal Student Aid may require the stu-
16 dent to submit further documentation.

17 “(D) CONTACT INFORMATION.—Informa-
18 tion about where a student or the student’s
19 family can seek additional information regard-
20 ing the financial aid offered, including contact
21 information for the institution’s financial aid of-
22 fice and the Department of Education’s website
23 on financial aid.

24 “(6) ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.—Any other
25 information the Secretary of Education, in consulta-

1 tion with the heads of relevant Federal agencies, in-
2 cluding the Secretary of the Treasury and the Direc-
3 tor of the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection,
4 determines necessary (based on the results of the
5 consumer testing under subsection (g)(2)) so that
6 students and parents can make informed loan bor-
7 rowing decisions, which may include—

8 “(A) the most recent cohort default rate,
9 as defined in section 435(m) of the Higher
10 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1085(m)),
11 with respect to an institution where more than
12 30 percent of enrolled students borrow loans to
13 pay for their education, and a comparison to
14 the national average cohort default rate;

15 “(B) the percentage of students at the in-
16 stitution who borrow student loans;

17 “(C) the median loan debt at graduation
18 for students at the institution (clearly marked
19 as including only Federal loans if private loan
20 data are not available to be included); and

21 “(D) any additional calculations deter-
22 mined necessary for ensuring that students un-
23 derstand full college costs, financial aid gaps,
24 and options for covering those gaps.

1 “(c) OTHER REQUIRED CONTENTS FOR FINANCIAL
 2 AID OFFER.—The standard form developed under sub-
 3 section (a) shall include, in addition to the information
 4 described in subsection (b), to be included on the Finan-
 5 cial Aid Offer in a concise format determined by the Sec-
 6 retary of Education, in consultation with the heads of rel-
 7 evant Federal agencies and the individuals and entities de-
 8 scribed in subsection (a), the following information:

9 “(1) ADDITIONAL OPTIONS.—At the institu-
 10 tion’s discretion—

11 “(A) additional options and potential re-
 12 sources for paying for the amount listed in sub-
 13 section (b)(3), such as tuition payment plans
 14 and the terms and conditions of those plans;
 15 and

16 “(B) a disclosure that Federal Direct
 17 PLUS Loans made under part D of title IV of
 18 the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
 19 1087a et seq.), private education loans, or other
 20 financing products may be available to cover re-
 21 maining need, except that the institution—

22 “(i) may not include an amount for
 23 such Federal Direct PLUS Loans, private
 24 education loans, or other financing prod-
 25 ucts; and

1 “(ii) shall include a disclosure that
2 such loans and agreements—

3 “(I) are subject to an additional
4 application process and have to be re-
5 paid by the borrower; and

6 “(II) may not be eligible for all
7 the benefits available for Federal Di-
8 rect Stafford Loans or Federal Direct
9 Unsubsidized Stafford Loans.

10 “(2) INFORMATION ON PRIVATE EDUCATION
11 LOANS AND OTHER FINANCING PRODUCTS.—The fol-
12 lowing information relating to private education
13 loans and other financing products:

14 “(A) A disclosure that students consid-
15 ering borrowing to cover the cost of attendance
16 should consider available Federal student loans
17 prior to applying for private education loans or
18 other financing products, including an expla-
19 nation that Federal student loans offer gen-
20 erally more favorable terms and beneficial re-
21 payment options than private education loans
22 and other financing products.

23 “(B) The impact of a proposed private
24 education loan or other financing product on
25 the student’s potential eligibility for other fi-

1 nancial assistance, including Federal financial
 2 assistance under title IV of the Higher Edu-
 3 cation Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070 et seq.).

4 “(C) A statement explaining the student’s
 5 ability to select a private educational lender or
 6 other financing product provider of the stu-
 7 dent’s choice.

8 “(3) STUDENT EMPLOYMENT.—Information on
 9 work-study employment opportunities offered in ac-
 10 cordance with part C of title IV of the Higher Edu-
 11 cation Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087–51 et seq.), in-
 12 stitutional work-study programs, or State work-
 13 study programs, including—

14 “(A) the maximum annual amount the stu-
 15 dent may earn through the program; and

16 “(B) a disclosure that any work-study
 17 amount offered may be—

18 “(i) subject to the availability of quali-
 19 fied employment opportunities upon the
 20 student’s enrollment; and

21 “(ii) disbursed over time as earned by
 22 the student.

23 “(d) ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR FINANCIAL
 24 AID OFFERS.—Each Financial Aid Offer shall meet the
 25 following requirements:

1 “(1) Include, in addition to the requirements
2 described in subsections (b) and (c), a concise sum-
3 mary, in plain language, of—

4 “(A) the terms and conditions of financial
5 aid recommended under paragraphs (2) and (4)
6 of subsection (b) and subsection (c)(3), and a
7 method to provide students with additional in-
8 formation about such terms and conditions,
9 such as links to the supplementary information;
10 and

11 “(B) Federal, State, or institutional condi-
12 tions required to receive and renew financial aid
13 and a method to provide students with addi-
14 tional information about these conditions, such
15 as links to the supplementary information.

16 “(2) Clearly distinguish between the aid offered
17 under paragraphs (2) and (4) of subsection (b) and
18 subsection (c)(3), by including a subtotal for the aid
19 offered in each of such paragraphs and by refraining
20 from commingling the different types of aid de-
21 scribed in such paragraphs.

22 “(3) Use standard terminology and definitions,
23 as described in subsection (e)(1) and use plain lan-
24 guage where possible.

1 “(4) If an institution’s recommended Federal
2 student loan aid offered in subsection (b)(4) is less
3 than the Federal maximum available to the student,
4 the institution shall provide additional information
5 on Federal student loans, including the types and
6 amounts for which the student is eligible in an at-
7 tached document or web page.

8 “(5) Use the standard offer form described in
9 subsection (e)(2).

10 “(6) Include the standardized statement regard-
11 ing the possible availability of Federal education
12 benefits, as established by the Secretary in accord-
13 ance with subsection (e)(3).

14 “(7) Include a delivery confirmation for elec-
15 tronic Financial Aid Offers, except that receipt of
16 the Financial Aid Offer shall not be considered an
17 acceptance or rejection of aid by the student.

18 “(8) With respect to dependent students, any
19 reference to private education loans shall be accom-
20 panied by—

21 “(A) information about the availability of,
22 and terms and conditions associated with, Fed-
23 eral Direct PLUS Loans under section 455 of
24 the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.

1 1087e) for the student’s parents regardless of
2 family income; and

3 “(B) a notification of the student’s in-
4 creased eligibility for Federal student loans
5 under title IV of the Higher Education Act of
6 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070 et seq.) if the student’s
7 parents are not able to borrow under the Fed-
8 eral Direct PLUS Loan program.

9 “(e) STANDARD INFORMATION ESTABLISHED BY
10 THE SECRETARY.—

11 “(1) STANDARD TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINI-
12 TIONS.—Not later than 3 months after the date of
13 enactment of the Understanding the True Cost of
14 College Act of 2025, the Secretary of Education, in
15 consultation with the heads of relevant Federal
16 agencies, including the Secretary of the Treasury
17 and the Director of the Consumer Financial Protec-
18 tion Bureau, and the individuals and entities de-
19 scribed in subsection (a), shall establish standard
20 terminology and definitions for the terms described
21 in subsection (b).

22 “(2) STANDARD FORM.—

23 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Edu-
24 cation shall develop multiple draft financial aid
25 offer forms for consumer testing, carry out con-

sumer testing for such forms, and establish a finalized standard financial aid offer form, in accordance with the process established under subsection (g) and the requirements of this section.

“(B) SEPARATE FINANCIAL AID OFFER FORMS.—The Secretary may develop separate financial aid offer forms for—

“(i) undergraduate students and graduate students; and

“(ii) first-time students and returning students.

“(3) ADDITIONAL BENEFITS.—The Secretary of Education, in consultation with the heads of relevant Federal agencies, including the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Defense, and the Director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, shall establish standard language notifying students that they may be eligible for education benefits (and where students can locate more information about such benefits) including benefits in accordance with each of the following:

“(A) Chapter 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, or 35 of title 38, United States Code.

1 “(B) Chapter 101, 105, 106A, 1606, 1607,
2 or 1608 of title 10, United States Code.

3 “(C) Section 1784a, 2005, or 2007 of title
4 10, United States Code.

5 “(f) SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION; REMOVAL OF
6 INFORMATION.—

7 “(1) SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION.—Nothing
8 in this section shall preclude an institution from
9 supplementing the Financial Aid Offer with addi-
10 tional information if such additional information uti-
11 lizes the same standard terminology identified in
12 subsection (e)(1) and does not misrepresent costs, fi-
13 nancial aid offered, or net price.

14 “(2) REMOVAL OF INFORMATION.—Nothing in
15 this section shall preclude an institution from delet-
16 ing a required item on a Financial Aid Offer if—

17 “(A) the student is ineligible for such item;

18 “(B) the institution does not participate in
19 the program related to such item; or

20 “(C) the cost of attendance item is not ap-
21 plicable to the student.

22 “(g) DEVELOPMENT OF FINANCIAL AID OFFER
23 FORM.—

24 “(1) DRAFT FORM.—Not later than 9 months
25 after the date of enactment of the Understanding

1 the True Cost of College Act of 2025, the Secretary
 2 of Education, in consultation with the heads of rel-
 3 evant Federal agencies, including the Secretary of
 4 the Treasury and the Director of the Consumer Fi-
 5 nancial Protection Bureau, and the individuals and
 6 entities described in subsection (a), shall design and
 7 produce multiple draft financial aid offer forms for
 8 consumer testing with postsecondary students or
 9 prospective students. In developing that form, the
 10 Secretary shall ensure—

11 “(A) that the headings described in para-
 12 graphs (1) through (4) of subsection (b) are in
 13 the same font, appear in the same order, and
 14 are displayed prominently on the financial aid
 15 offer form, such that none of that information
 16 is inappropriately omitted or de-emphasized;

17 “(B) that the other information required
 18 in subsection (b) appears in a standard format
 19 and design on the Financial Aid Offer; and

20 “(C) that the institution may include a
 21 logo or brand alongside the title of the Finan-
 22 cial Aid Offer.

23 “(2) CONSUMER TESTING.—

24 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 9
 25 months after the date of enactment of the Un-

1 derstanding the True Cost of College Act of
2 2025, the Secretary of Education, in consulta-
3 tion with the heads of relevant Federal agen-
4 cies, shall establish a process to submit the fi-
5 nancial aid offer form drafts developed under
6 paragraph (1) for consumer testing among rep-
7 resentatives of students (including low-income
8 students, first-generation college students, adult
9 students, veterans, servicemembers, and pro-
10 spective students), students' families (including
11 low-income families, families with first-genera-
12 tion college students, and families with prospec-
13 tive students), institutions of higher education,
14 secondary school and postsecondary counselors,
15 and nonprofit consumer groups.

16 “(B) PILOT.—During such consumer test-
17 ing, the Secretary shall ensure that not less
18 than 16 and not more than 24 eligible institu-
19 tions use the draft forms developed under para-
20 graph (1), including institutions—

21 “(i) that reflect a proportionate rep-
22 resentation (based on the total number of
23 students enrolled in postsecondary edu-
24 cation) of community colleges, for-profit

1 institutions, 4-year public institutions, and
2 4-year private nonprofit institutions; and

3 “(ii) that reflect geographic diversity.

4 “(C) LENGTH OF CONSUMER TESTING.—

5 The Secretary of Education shall ensure that
6 the consumer testing under this paragraph lasts
7 no longer than 8 months after the process for
8 consumer testing is developed under subpara-
9 graph (A).

10 “(3) FINAL FORM.—

11 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The results of con-
12 sumer testing under paragraph (2) shall be
13 used in the final development of the financial
14 aid offer form.

15 “(B) REPORTING REQUIREMENT.—Not
16 later than 3 months after the date the con-
17 sumer testing under paragraph (2) concludes,
18 the Secretary of Education shall submit to Con-
19 gress and publish on its website the final stand-
20 ard financial aid offer form and a report detail-
21 ing the results of such testing, including wheth-
22 er the Secretary of Education added any addi-
23 tional items to the standard financial aid offer
24 form pursuant to subsection (b)(6).

1 “(4) **AUTHORITY TO MODIFY.**—The Secretary
 2 of Education may modify or remove the definitions,
 3 terms, formatting, or design of the financial aid
 4 offer form based on the results of consumer testing
 5 required under this subsection and before finalizing
 6 the form, or in subsequent consumer testing. The
 7 Secretary may also recommend additional changes to
 8 Congress.”.

9 **SEC. 3. MANDATORY FORM.**

10 Part B of title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965
 11 (20 U.S.C. 1011 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end
 12 the following:

13 **“SEC. 124. USE OF MANDATORY FINANCIAL AID OFFER**
 14 **FORM AND TERMS.**

15 “(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Notwithstanding any other pro-
 16 vision of law, each institution of higher education that re-
 17 ceives Federal financial assistance under this Act shall—

18 “(1) use the financial aid offer form developed
 19 under section 484 of the Higher Education Oppor-
 20 tunity Act (20 U.S.C. 1092 note) in providing
 21 paper, mobile-optimized offers, or other electronic of-
 22 fers to all students who apply for aid and are accept-
 23 ed at the institution; and

24 “(2) use the standard terminology and defini-
 25 tions developed by the Secretary of Education under

1 subsection (e)(1) of such section 484 for all commu-
2 nications from the institution related to Financial
3 Aid Offers.

4 “(b) EFFECTIVE DATES.—The requirements under
5 this section shall take effect at the start of the first award
6 year after the Secretary of Education finalizes the stand-
7 ard terminology and form developed in accordance with
8 section 484 of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (20
9 U.S.C. 1092 note).

10 “(c) ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES.—Section 492
11 shall not apply with respect to regulations promulgated
12 in accordance with this section.”.

○