
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 1547	Hearing Date:	June 17, 2026
Author:	Bains		
Version:	January 6, 2026		
Urgency:	Yes	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Olgalilia Ramirez		

Subject: University of California: branch campus of a school of medicine in the County of Kern: feasibility study.

SUMMARY

This bill, an urgency measure, requires the University of California (UC), by January 1, 2028, to complete a feasibility study for the establishment of a UC medical school branch campus in Kern County.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the UC as a public trust to be administered by the Regents of the UC; and, grants the Regents full powers of organization and government, subject only to such legislative control as may be necessary to insure security of its funds, compliance with the terms of its endowments, statutory requirements around competitive bidding and contracts, sales of property and the purchase of materials, goods and services. (California Constitution Article IX, § (9)(a))
- 2) Establishes UC, California State University (CSU), and California Community Colleges (CCC) as the three segments of public higher education. (Education Code (EC) § 66010, et seq.)
- 3) Grants the UC the exclusive jurisdiction in public higher education over instruction in the profession of law and over graduate instruction in the professions of medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine. Stipulates that the UC has the sole authority in public higher education to award the doctoral degree in all fields of learning, except that it may agree with the CSU to award joint doctoral degrees in selected fields. Mandates that the UC be the primary state-supported academic agency for research. (EC § 66010.4)
- 4) Creates the UC San Francisco (UCSF), San Joaquin Valley Regional Campus Medical Education Endowment Fund. Stipulates that upon appropriation by the Legislature, moneys in the endowment fund must be allocated to the UC to support the annual operating costs for the development, operation, and maintenance of a branch campus of the UC San Francisco, School of Medicine in the San Joaquin Valley. (EC § 92162, et seq.)
- 5) Requires, upon appropriation by the Legislature and a determination by the Controller of sufficient funds in the endowment fund, that moneys in the fund to

be used to cover the UC's estimated costs of applying for and obtaining approval and accreditation from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME), as provided. (EC § 92162, et seq.)

- 6) Requires moneys in the endowment fund to initially be invested with the goal of achieving capital appreciation to create a balance of \$500 hundred million to generate ongoing earnings to cover the estimated annual operating costs associated with the development, operation, and maintenance of the branch campus, and, upon the determination of the Controller that the endowment fund balance is \$500 hundred million, requires moneys in the endowment fund to be invested to generate earnings to fund annual operating costs associated with the development, operation, and maintenance of the branch campus. (EC § 92162, et seq.)
- 7) Creates the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund in the State Treasury to support potential development of a UC medical school in Kern County. Funds received by the UC or the Controller, for specified purposes of the fund must be deposited into the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund. Defines "endowment fund" as the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund. (EC § 92168, et seq.)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Requires the UC, by January 1, 2028, to do both of the following:
 - a) Complete a feasibility study and reasonably attempt to consult with the specified local stakeholders, to determine the steps necessary to establish a branch campus of an existing UC medical school in Kern County, and include in the feasibility study a comprehensive analysis of the requirements, challenges, and opportunities related to establishing a branch campus of an existing UC medical school in Kern County, including, but not limited to, all of the following:
 - i) The identification of potential sites for the branch campus of a medical school.
 - ii) An assessment of construction and infrastructure needs for the branch campus of a medical school and an assessment of the ability to comply with all the resource requirements of the LCME.
 - iii) Recommended recruitment strategies for qualified faculty and staff.
 - iv) An evaluation of the ability to comply with the accreditation requirements of the LCME as a branch campus.
 - v) Development of a medical education curriculum.
 - vi) A financial analysis, including, but not limited to, projected costs

and potential funding sources.

- vii) A review of graduate medical education opportunities in the Kern County and recommendations on how to ensure that graduates of the branch campus of a medical school in Kern County have access to a medical residency in Kern County.
- b) Submit the feasibility study, including detailed findings, recommendations, and an implementation timeline to the Governor and the Legislature, as specified and available on its website.
- c) Declares the bill an urgency measure in order to address the significant adverse health impacts of the shortage of physicians serving the residents of Kern County.
- d) States various findings and declarations relating to the need for health care professionals in Kern County.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) **Need for the bill.** According to the author, "With some of the lowest ratios of healthcare providers in the state and a declining number of medical students from rural backgrounds, urgent action is needed to ensure access to quality care. By requiring a feasibility study for a UC medical school in Kern County, AB 1547 paves the way for expanding medical education in the region, ultimately helping to train and retain doctors who understand and are committed to serving rural populations. This investment is essential to building a healthier future for some of California's most underserved communities."
- 2) **UC Medical Education in the Central Valley.** The UCSF Fresno was established in 1975 as a graduate medical education campus of the UCSF School of Medicine, with support from the Legislature and the Veteran's Administration, to address the severe shortage of physicians in California's San Joaquin Valley. Today, UCSF Fresno is the largest academic physician training program between San Francisco, Sacramento, and Los Angeles. Further, as a way for UC Merced (UCM) to begin to build partnerships with existing UC medical schools and facilitate its involvement with academic medicine, UCM partnered with the UC Davis (UCD) School of Medicine to help develop a new medical education program focusing on the health needs of the region. UCD, in partnership with UCSF Fresno and UCM, launched the San Joaquin Valley Program in Medical Education (PRIME) in 2010 to recruit and prepare students for future careers in medicine within the San Joaquin Valley. The San Joaquin Valley extends 250 miles from the San Joaquin Valley in the North to Kern County in the South. San Joaquin Valley PRIME students complete their basic sciences/pre-clinical education at UCD, then complete most of their required third-year core clerkships at UCSF Fresno, with options for selecting the amount of time spent in the fourth year at UCSF Fresno or UCD. In 2018-19, management and oversight of the San Joaquin Valley PRIME program transitioned from UCD to UCSF.

In 2020, the UCSF School of Medicine received a base budget augmentation of 15 million in ongoing state support to develop an eight-year baccalaureate/M.D. program based in the San Joaquin Valley in partnership with UCSF Fresno regional campus and UCM. Built on the success of the San Joaquin Valley PRIME program, San Joaquin Valley PRIME + was designed for students from the San Joaquin Valley region who wish to remain in the area for both college and medical school, which will increase the likelihood of practicing there upon graduation. In fall 2023, the inaugural class of 15 students, all of whom have deep ties to the San Joaquin Valley, enrolled in an enhanced baccalaureate degree program at UCM, designed to prepare them for success in medical school. This new track will enable UCM to build the capacity to offer the classroom-based medical school curriculum, which the students will complete during the first 18 months of medical school starting in fall 2027. Students will complete their clinical experiences during the remaining 2.5 years of medical school at the UCSF Fresno regional campus.

According to UC, both San Joaquin Valley PRIME and San Joaquin Valley PRIME+ represent the first part of a three-phased approach to expanding medical education in the San Joaquin Valley. During phase two, the goal is to increase enrollment from 12 to 15 students to 50 per year starting in 2027, which will result in 200 total students enrolled in the program by 2030. Phase three has the goal of establishing an independent medical school at UCM.

The UC has made several efforts to expand physician training opportunities in the San Joaquin Valley, the feasibility study required by this bill would provide additional information regarding whether a branch medical school campus in Kern County could serve as a viable strategy for increasing medical education capacity and addressing regional workforce needs in that county.

- 3) **Feasibility of a new medical school in Kern County.** A substantial barrier for establishing a new medical school is ensuring sufficient, ongoing resources can support the operating budget of a high-quality UC medical education program. Existing law creates the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund in the State Treasury to support potential development of a UC medical school in Kern County. The author contends that while existing law established an endowment fund in support of a UC Kern medical school, a pathway towards the creation of the campus is not identified. This bill requires the completion of a feasibility study regarding the establishment of a branch campus of an existing UC medical school in Kern County, including an analysis of potential sites, infrastructure needs, accreditation requirements, faculty recruitment strategies, curriculum development, financial needs, and graduate medical education opportunities.
- 4) **Related and Prior legislation.**

AB 1852 (Bains, 2026), in part, creates a fallback mechanism for establishing a public medical school in Kern County if, by July 1, 2027, the UC Office of the President has not taken formal, verifiable steps to establish a school of medicine in Kern County. Further, the measure authorizes CSU Bakersfield and the Kern Community College District, acting through a newly authorized local public

agency called the Kern Medical Education Authority, to establish and operate a medical school in Kern County, subject to accreditation. AB 1852 failed passage in the Assembly Higher Education Committee.

AB 58 (Soria, 2025), in part, would have requested the UC to submit a report to the Legislature, on or before August 31, 2026, on the financial requirements necessary to expand the current UCSF and UCM medical education collaboration, the San Joaquin Valley PRIME+ program, and to transition the program into a fully independent medical school operated by UCM. AB 58 was held on suspense in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

AB 730 (Arambula, 2025), in part, would have, by July 1, 2026, and each July 1 thereafter, appropriated \$15,000,000 from the General Fund to the UC Regents for allocation to the UCM Medical Education Collaborative, as defined. AB 730 was held on suspense in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

AB 1361 (Bains, 2025), in part, would have required the UC, by January 1, 2027, to complete a feasibility study, in consultation with local voluntary stakeholders, including, but not limited to, the Kern County Medical Society, the Kern Medical Hospital Authority, Kern Family Health Care, at least one labor union representing UC patient care and technical employees, and at least one labor union representing health care workers in the County of Kern, to determine the steps necessary to establish a UC medical school in Kern County. AB 1361 was held on suspense in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

AB 2357 (Bains, Chapter 959, Statutes of 2024) in part, establishes the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund for the purposes of supporting the operating costs associated with establishing a branch campus of an existing UC medical school in Kern County.

AB 3081 (Arambula, 2023) would have appropriated \$15 million from the General Fund to the Regents of the UC on or before July 1, 2025, and each July 1 thereafter, for allocation to the UCM Medical Education Collaborative, and requires UCM Medical Education Collaborative, as a condition of receiving the appropriation, to develop a program, consistent with its mission, and in conjunction with the health facilities of its medical residency programs, to identify eligible medical residents and to assist those medical residents in applying for physician retention programs. AB 3081 was held on suspense in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

AB 2202 (Gray, Chapter 756, Statutes of 2018), which, in part, established the UCSF San Joaquin Valley Regional Campus Medical Education Endowment Fund to support the annual operating costs of a branch campus of UCSF School of Medicine in the San Joaquin Valley.

AB 174 (Gray, 2015), SB 841 (Cannella, 2014), and SB 131 (Cannella, 2015) *Valley PRIME Programs*, all of which would have appropriated funds for the San Joaquin Valley PRIME Program, were held on suspense in the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

SUPPORT

California Academy of Family Physicians
County of Kern
CPCA Advocates

OPPOSITION

None received

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