

Date of Hearing: March 10, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

AB 1618 (Rogers) – As Introduced January 21, 2026

SUBJECT: Food insecurity survey

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to annually conduct a statewide food insecurity survey modeled after the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) national survey, unless a comparable federal survey is conducted that year. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires CDSS to annually conduct a statewide survey to assess food insecurity in the state, modeled after the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) national household food security survey.
- 2) Requires CDSS' first statewide food insecurity survey to be completed on or before July 1, 2027.
- 3) Requires CDSS, on or before October 1, 2027, and annually thereafter, to make the results of the statewide food insecurity survey publicly available on its website.
- 4) Prohibits CDSS, notwithstanding 1) above, from conducting a statewide food insecurity survey during a year in which either of the following occurs:
 - a) The USDA ERS conducts a national household food security survey; or,
 - b) A federal agency conducts a food security survey that is a successor of, or similar to, the USDA ERS national household food security survey.
- 5) Defines the "food insecurity" as having the same meaning as 2) below.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Acknowledges access to sufficient affordable and healthy food as a human right and requires state agencies and departments to consider this state policy. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 18700(a)(1))
- 2) Defines "food insecurity" as the occasional or constant lack of access to the food one needs to live a healthy life and the uncertainty of being able to acquire enough food to meet the needs of an individual or household due to insufficient money or other sources. (WIC 18700(a)(2))

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown, this bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

Background: *Food Insecurity.* The USDA, which monitors food insecurity and oversees the nation's largest food aid programs, defines food security as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life." It categorizes food security into four levels:

Ranges of Food Security

LEVEL OF SECURITY		DEFINITION
Food Secure	High Food Security	Households had no problems, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food
	Marginal Food Security	Households had problems or anxiety at times about accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety and quantity of food were not substantially reduced
Food Insecure	Low Food Security	Households reduced the quality, variety and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted
	Very Low Food Security	At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money or other resources for food

Sources: Feeding America, What is Food Insecurity? <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/> (Accessed March 1, 2020)

While California declared food as a human right in 2023 [SB 628 (Hurtado), Chapter 879, Statutes of 2023], and produces nearly half of the nation’s fruits and vegetables, data from the Food Security Supplement (FSS)¹ to the U.S. Census’ Current Population Survey (CPS) show that 1.75 million California households (12.5%) experienced food insecurity at some point in 2024. Factors contributing to food insecurity include socioeconomic disparities, geographic barriers, rising grocery prices, and inflation, among other causes. For individuals who face food insecurity, the choice is often between nurturing their physical health or maintaining other aspects of their lives, such as purchasing necessary medications or paying rent to maintain housing.

A lack of adequate food can have long-term physical health consequences across the lifespan. During pregnancy, it can lead to poor birth outcomes, impacting a child’s physical and cognitive development. Young children with inadequate or interrupted food intake are at a higher risk of iron deficiency, respiratory illnesses, infections, and developmental delays. In school-aged children, food insecurity is associated with poor academic performance, attention difficulties, and behavioral issues. In adolescence, food insecurity is associated with drug and alcohol abuse, greater exposure to violence, high-risk pregnancy, and suicidal ideation, and may lead to risky sexual behavior, as food insecurity has a negative influence on the ability of young people to consider the long-term consequences of risky behaviors. Long-term, these disadvantages contribute to intergenerational cycles of poverty and food insecurity. In adulthood, food insecurity increases the risk of chronic, diet-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers due to poor nutrition and limited access to healthcare. Beyond physical health, the emotional and psychological stress of uncertain food access causes anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

Federal Measurement of Food Insecurity: USDA Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement. Since 1995, the USDA has measured food access, food spending, and use of food assistance programs through the annual FSS, administered each December by the U.S. Census Bureau as part of the nationally representative CPS. The primary purpose of the FSS is to monitor the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity in the U.S., providing data that

¹ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-security-in-the-united-states>

inform federal nutrition assistance programs and broader anti-hunger efforts. National estimates are generally released the following year in ERS's annual report on household food security.

The findings of the survey reflect household experiences of food hardship. The full instrument contains 18 questions for households with children (10 for households without children), covering a spectrum of conditions ranging from anxiety about food running out to reductions in food intake and disrupted eating patterns. Examples include whether respondents worried food would run out before they had money to buy more, whether meals were skipped, or whether adults or children went an entire day without eating because of cost constraints.

Questions Used to Assess the Food Security of Households in the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement

1. "We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
2. "The food that we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
3. "We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
4. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in the household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? (Yes/No)
5. (If yes to question 4) How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?
6. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food? (Yes/No)
7. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry, but didn't eat, because there wasn't enough money for food? (Yes/No)
8. In the last 12 months, did you lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food? (Yes/No)
9. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food? (Yes/No)
10. (If yes to question 9) How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?

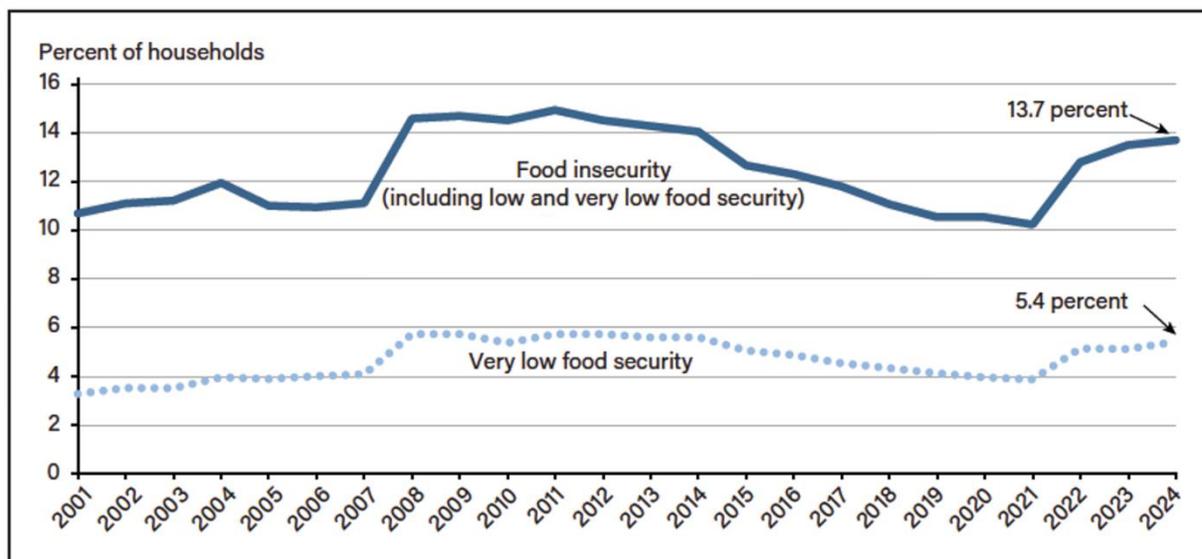
(Questions 11–18 were only asked if the household included children ages 0–17)

11. “We relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed our children because we were running out of money to buy food.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
 12. “We couldn’t feed our children a balanced meal, because we couldn’t afford that.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
 13. “The children were not eating enough because there wasn’t enough money for food.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?
 14. In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of any of the children’s meals because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
 15. In the last 12 months, were the children ever hungry because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
 16. In the last 12 months, did any of the children ever skip a meal because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
 17. (If yes to question 16) How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?
18. In the last 12 months, did any of the children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)

Responses are scored using a standardized methodology that categorizes households into four levels: high food security, marginal food security, low food security, and very low food security.

Because the FSS has been used consistently for decades, it allows for longitudinal trend analysis, comparison across demographic groups, and evaluation of economic shocks or policy changes. See table below to observe food insecurity prevalence trends in the U.S. from 2001-2024.

Prevalence of food insecurity in 2024 similar to 2023 prevalence



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements data.

National Food Insecurity Trends. According to USDA’s 2024 Household Food Security report², 86.3% of U.S. households were food secure for the entire year, meaning they consistently had enough food to meet their needs. The survey measures food security based on whether households reported being able to obtain sufficient food, though it does not directly assess whether diets fully met standards for an active, healthy life. Research nevertheless shows that survey-based food security measures are strongly associated with health, nutrition, and child development outcomes.

The remaining 13.7% of households, about 18 million, experienced food insecurity at some point during the year due to insufficient financial resources. Of these, 8.3% (11.1 million households) had low food security, meaning they reduced diet quality or variety but generally avoided major disruptions in food intake. Another 5.4% (7.2 million households) had very low food security, meaning household members reduced food intake or skipped meals because they could not afford enough food.

Furthermore, 81.6% of U.S. households under 18 years of age were food secure, while 18.4%, about 6.7 million households, experienced food insecurity at some point during the year. Research consistently finds that food insecurity is associated with lower food spending, reduced calorie purchases, poorer diet quality, and fewer meals compared to food-secure households, even after accounting for income differences.

According to the report’s demographic data, food insecurity rates exceeded the national average of 13.7% for several groups, including households with children (18.4%), particularly those with children under 6 years of age (17.8%) and single-parent households (36.8% for single mothers and 23.8% for single fathers.) Rates were also higher among women living alone (16.2%); households with Black, non-Hispanic (24.4%) and Hispanic (20.2%) persons; and households with incomes below 100% (39.4%), 130% (38.3%), and 185% (32.8%) of the federal poverty threshold. Additionally, food insecurity was higher in principal cities (16%), rural areas (15.9%), and the South (15%).

State-Level Food Insecurity Data. In addition to producing reliable national estimates, the survey also generates state-level food insecurity estimates that can be compared over time. To produce reliable estimates, the USDA averages three years of data rather than using single-year figures, which can be unstable, especially for smaller states. For the 2022-24 period, California’s very low food insecurity rate was lower than the national average, placing it among the 11 states with rates below the U.S. rate. See table below for changes in prevalence of household food insecurity and very low food security over time for California.

Table 5
Change in prevalence of household food insecurity and very low food security by State and the District of Columbia: 2022-2024 (average), 2019-2021 (average), and 2012-2014 (average) 1

State	Food insecurity (low or very low food security)					Very low food security				
	Average 2022-2024	Average 2019-2021	Average 2012-2014	Change 2019-2021 to 2022-2024	Change 2012-2014 to 2022-2024	Average 2022-2024	Average 2019-2021	Average 2012-2014	Change 2019-2021 to 2022-2024	Change 2012-2014 to 2022-2024
	-----Percent-----			Percentage points		-----Percent-----			Percentage points	

² https://www-tx.ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/_laserfiche/publications/113623/ERR-358.pdf?v=78370

U.S.	13.3	10.4	14.3	2.9*	-1.0*	5.2	4.0	5.6	1.2*	-0.4*
CA	12.5	9.6	13.5	2.9*	-1.0*	4.4	3.5	5.1	.9*	-7*

CalFresh. While California has a number of state food-assistance programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is the largest federal food safety-net program that serves as the first line of defense against hunger and food insecurity.

Overseen by CDSS and administered locally by county human services departments, CalFresh serves a large caseload, with substantial shares comprising low-income working families with children, elderly and disabled people, and very low-income individuals with significant barriers to employment. Participants use Electronic Benefits Transfer cards to purchase eligible food items such as fruits and vegetables, meat, dairy products, and seeds and plants that produce food at authorized retailers, including grocery stores, supermarkets, and farmers’ markets.

According to the Legislative Analyst’s Office, in 2024-25, about 5.5 million Californians received a total of over \$12.5 billion in CalFresh benefits, all of it federally funded, with an average monthly benefit of about \$192 per person. To participate in CalFresh, the gross income limit is 200% of the federal poverty line due to broad-based categorical eligibility, which is \$31,320 for one person.

Recent Federal Policy Changes Affecting Food Security Programs & Data. Signed by President Trump on July 1, 2025, H.R.1³ makes significant changes to SNAP⁴ by reducing federal funding, tightening eligibility requirements, and shifting greater fiscal responsibility to states. The law expands work requirements to additional age groups, limits exemptions, and increases verification and reporting obligations, which may result in caseload reductions and higher administrative workload for counties. It also restructures benefit calculations and restricts states’ flexibility to provide certain waivers, while requiring states to assume a larger share of benefits and administrative costs. Collectively, these changes are expected to reduce overall participation and benefits for some households while increasing state administrative and budget pressures.

On September 20, 2025, the Trump Administration terminated the USDA’s annual food security survey and related household food security reports, ending nearly 30 years of systematic national measurement of household food insecurity. The USDA further announced that it would discontinue future food security data collection and reporting, characterizing the annual survey as “redundant,” “costly,” and “extraneous,” and asserting that other data sources were more accurate and timelier. The 2024 dataset is the final release, with no further food insecurity estimates planned.

Advocates contend that no other federal dataset produces nationally comparable, severity-scaled estimates in the same manner. Advocates depend on these data to identify regions and populations⁵ with the highest rate of food insecurity, target interventions, and allocate resources efficiently. The data also supports outreach and public awareness campaigns, helping to mobilize support for efforts to reduce food insecurity. Researchers also note that canceling the report, which evaluates the impact of nutrition assistance programs like SNAP, would make it harder to

³ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1>

⁴ <https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/Health/2025/HR-1-111325.pdf>

⁵ <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>

assess the effects of recent federal food assistance cuts and understand changes in food insecurity.

Other State Legislative Responses. In response to growing concerns about food insecurity and the availability of reliable data, several states have introduced legislation to study hunger or establish statewide food insecurity surveys.

- *HB 866 (Cousins) of 2026 in Virginia:* Would have required the Virginia Department of Social Services, in coordination with other state agencies, to convene a workgroup to develop a statewide food insecurity and hunger survey and report findings to the Governor and General Assembly by December 1, 2026. HB 866 was left in Rules Committee.
- *SB 2581 (Bradford) of 2026 in Mississippi:* Would have established a Mississippi Anti-Hunger and Anti-Food Insecurity Task Force to study the causes and prevalence of food insecurity and develop policy recommendations to reduce hunger in the state. SB 2581 was held in the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee.
- *A9168 (Woerner) & S8553 (Hinchev) of 2025 in New York:* Would require the New York State Department of Public Health to annually collect and publicly report food security data at the county level, establishing a statewide food insecurity data system. A9168 and S8553 are pending before the Assembly and Senate Health Committee.

This bill requires CDSS to design and conduct an annual statewide food insecurity survey modeled on the federal food security survey beginning July 1, 2027, unless a comparable federal survey is conducted that year. *This bill* also requires CDSS to publicly report survey findings by October 1, 2027. A state-administered survey modeled on the federal instrument may allow California to maintain alignment in definitions, severity thresholds, and scoring methodology, preserving comparability across jurisdictions and over time.

Author’s Statement: According to the Author, “[This bill] is necessary to ensure California has access to accurate, reliable, and consistent data on food insecurity across the state. For decades, policymakers, food banks, and service providers relied on the federal Household Food Security Survey to assess need, allocate resources, and evaluate the effectiveness of hunger-relief programs—sadly, those days are over.

“When the current Administration discontinued of the Household Food Security Survey, we lost an important resource that has been used for decades to identify the needs to our communities. California faces a significant data gap that limits the state’s ability to understand where food insecurity persists, and which communities are most affected. Without comprehensive data, food banks, nonprofit organizations, and state agencies are hindered in their ability to respond effectively, particularly in rural, low-income, and underserved communities where food insecurity is often underreported.

“[This bill] addresses this gap by establishing a state-administered food insecurity survey under the California Department of Social Services, ensuring that families experiencing hunger continue to be counted. By restoring and strengthening food insecurity data collection at the state level, [This bill] will support evidence-based policymaking, improve coordination amongst service providers, and help ensure that resources are directed to the communities that need them most.”

Equity Implications: *This bill* may advance equity by producing disaggregated data that illuminates disparities across race and ethnicity, income, household type, age, area of residence, and geography. Because food insecurity disproportionately affects Black, Latino, low-income rural, and single-parent households, food insecurity data may help identify where need is concentrated and direct resources accordingly. If the survey includes sufficient sample sizes for smaller populations and regions, it could improve visibility for communities that are often statistically underrepresented in national datasets.

Policy Considerations: This bill requires CDSS to design, administer, and complete a statistically valid statewide survey by July 1, 2027. Given the changes to food safety net programs, it is important to capture data as early as possible to reduce the lapse in time data are collected; however, July 1, 2027, may not provide sufficient time for proper implementation. The October 1, 2027, deadline to publish the results may also limit CDSS' ability to fully analyze the data.

Should this bill move forward, the author may wish to extend the survey completion and reporting deadline by one year to allow CDSS sufficient time for survey development, data collection, and analysis while ensuring there is the least possible lapse in data collected.

Additionally, CDSS does not currently have the expertise or technical infrastructure necessary to independently design and administer a statewide survey and analyze the resulting data. Conducting a statistically valid statewide survey requires specialized survey design, sampling methodology, and data analysis capacity that may require partnerships with academic institutions or external vendors.

Should this bill move forward, the author may wish to consider authorizing CDSS to contract or collaborate with a public research institution or external vendor to conduct the survey, analyze the data, and publish the survey results.

Proposed Committee Amendments: The Committee proposes amendments to address policy considerations stated above to do the following:

- Extend the deadline for CDSS to design, administer, and complete the statewide food insecurity survey from July 1, 2027, to July 1, 2028, and publish the survey results from October 1, 2027, to October 1, 2028.
- Authorize CDSS to contract or collaborate with a public research institution or external vendor to design, administer, and analyze the statewide food insecurity survey, and publish the survey results.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 1734 (Stefani) of the current legislative session, establishes a two-year pilot program within the California Health Interview Survey, administered in collaboration with the University of California, Los Angeles, to ensure continued funding and inclusion of standardized food insecurity questions for households at or below 400% of the federal poverty level.

SB 1025 (Hurtado) of the current legislative session, establishes the Office of Food Security and Affordability to coordinate statewide food insecurity outreach, partnerships, research, and

emergency response efforts while administering related funding and programs. *SB 1025 is pending before the Senate Human Services Committee.*

AB 1967 (Jackson) of 2024, would have established a Food Insecurity Officer within CDSS to coordinate and address food insecurity across state government operations. *AB 1967 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

SB 628 (Hurtado), Chapter 879, Statutes of 2023, see comments above.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Redwood Empire Food Bank (Sponsor)
AARP
California Food Recovery Coalition
Californians Against Waste
Hunger Action Los Angeles INC
MEND-Meet Each Need with Dignity
Purfoods, LLC dba Mom's Meals
Valley Vision

Opposition

No opposition on file.

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