

Date of Hearing: March 17, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Mia Bonta, Chair
AB 1734 (Stefani) – As Introduced February 5, 2026

SUBJECT: Count Hunger Act.

SUMMARY: Requires the State Department of Public Health (DPH) to establish a two-year pilot program in collaboration with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to ensure that the sets of questions and data linked to food insecurity within the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) administered by UCLA are funded and covered. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires this bill to be known and authorizes it to be cited as the Count Hunger Act.
- 2) Defines “California Health Interview Survey” or “CHIS” to mean the statewide health survey administered by UCLA, in collaboration with state departments and other agencies, and conducted annually through interviews with thousands of households in the state. The survey addresses various health matters, including, but not limited to, use of and access to health care, health conditions and behaviors, and a range of topics that influence health, such as public program participation, housing, income and employment, climate change, food, gun violence, and adverse childhood experiences.
- 3) Requires DPH to establish a two-year pilot program, in collaboration with UCLA, to ensure that the sets of questions linked to food insecurity, as those sets were implemented in the California Health Interview Survey for the 2025 calendar year, are funded and covered within the CHIS for purposes of the two years of the pilot program as described in 10) below.
- 4) Requires the portion of the CHIS survey relating to food insecurity to apply to all households whose income is at or below 400% of the federal poverty level (FPL).
- 5) Requires UCLA, in collaboration with DPH, to publish any available statewide-, regional- and county-level data, as feasible, that are linked to the food insecurity portion of the CHIS.
- 6) Requires UCLA to post the data described in 5) above on the AskCHIS reporting tool of the CHIS internet website in a manner accessible to the public.
- 7) Requires data published or posted pursuant to this bill to exclude any personally identifiable information.
- 8) Requires this bill to be implemented upon appropriation made by the Legislature for this purpose.
- 9) Prohibits this bill from being applicable to UCLA unless the Regents of the University of California (UC), by resolution, make this section applicable.
- 10) Requires the two-year pilot program described in this bill to be implemented for the 2027 and 2028 calendar years, or two subsequent calendar years, whichever is earlier based on when the appropriation described in 8) above made available.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Declares the established policy of the state that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food. [Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) § 18700]
- 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 resources. [*Ibid.*]
- 3) Requires DPH to consider the state policy described in 1) above when establishing grant criteria pertinent to the distribution of sufficient affordable food. [*Ibid.*]
- 4) Establishes the UC as a public trust to be administered by the Regents and grants the Regents full powers of organization and governance subject only to legislative control as necessary to ensure the security of funds, compliance with terms of its endowments, and the statutory requirements around competitive bidding and contracts, sales of property, and the purchase of materials, goods, and services. (Article IX, § (9) (a) of the California Constitution).

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

COMMENTS:

- 1) **PURPOSE OF THIS BILL.** According to the author, this bill will create a pilot to restore funding to CHIS' food insecurity questionnaire, an existing survey which asks up to 25,000 Californians questions to understand the unmet needs in our communities. The author continues that this bill also accounts for the high cost of living in California by increasing the threshold in which food insecurity questions are asked to respondents from 200% FPL to 400% FPL. The author concludes that hunger doesn't disappear when people stop measuring it, it just becomes easier to ignore.
- 2) **BACKGROUND.**
 - a) **Food Insecurity.** SB 628 (Hurtado), Chapter 879, Statutes of 2023 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 resources. According to a 2026 article published in the *Journal of Nutrition* titled, "Impacts of Nutrition Policy on Food Insecurity and Individual Health in the United States: A Narrative Review," food insecurity is both a consequence and a driver of structural inequities, reflecting not only economic hardship but also shaping long-term health outcomes. The article further notes that food insecurity contributes to higher rates of chronic conditions such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and depression—conditions often exacerbated by limited access to affordable, nutritious food, and culturally appropriate care.
 - b) **Data Sources on Food Insecurity.**
 - i) **United States (U.S.) Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Security Supplement.** On September 20, 2025, the USDA announced the termination of future Household Food Security Reports. The reports had tracked food insecurity data since 1995. According to a 2025 article published by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of

Public Health titled “Cancellation of food insecurity survey a blow to understanding hunger in the U.S.,” the household food insecurity data has served as a consistent national benchmark, guiding solutions and bringing attention to areas of greatest need. The article highlights that the data had been used by policymakers to assess the performance of federal nutrition assistance programs, by researchers to study food insecurity to inform policy recommendations, and, by nonprofit organizations and advocacy groups to identify regions and populations with the highest rates of food insecurity, target interventions, and allocate resources efficiently. The article also notes that the data supports outreach and public awareness campaigns, helping to mobilize support for efforts to reduce food insecurity. The announcement on the USDA government website characterized the reports as “redundant, costly, politicized, and extraneous studies” that “do nothing more than fear monger.”

- ii) **CHIS.** In California, the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, in collaboration with DPH and the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), conducts CHIS. According to the UC, CHIS interviews more than 20,000 households each year on a wide range of health matters, from use of and access to health care, to health conditions and behaviors, to a range of topics that influence health: public program participation, housing, income and employment, climate change, food, adverse childhood experiences, and much more. CHIS is the largest population health state survey in the nation.

Data collected is publicly available using the AskCHIS tool. Topics can be viewed across a range of sociodemographic factors, including: race and ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, education, citizenship, language, veteran status, and more.

According to the UC, major funders of this survey include DHCS, DHCS Community Service Division, DPH, California Civil Rights Department, California Health Benefit Exchange, First 5 California, The California Endowment, California Health Care Foundation, and the California Rural Indian Health Board. Each organization generally provides funding for specific topics on the CHIS survey, and costs for questions are based on a proportional division of the total program costs according to the length of their specific questions.

CHIS includes a set of questions related to food insecurity. This set of questions is funded by DPH and is currently targeted at households with income at or below 200% of the FPL. For context, the FPL is a measure of income updated each year by the federal Department of Health and Human Services that is used to determine eligibility for certain federal programs and benefits such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The questions center on the ability of the household to afford food. The survey questions intended to be covered and funded by this bill are summarized below:

- (1) In the last 12 months, how often did food not last?
- (2) In the last 12 months, how often could you not afford balanced meals?
- (3) In the last 12 months, did you or other adults cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? How often did this happen?

- (4) In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money to buy food?
- (5) In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because you couldn't afford enough food?

For further details, the survey questions are available on UCLA's CHIS website.

According to the UC, DPH announced to the UC that the funding for the food insecurity questions is in jeopardy. According to information provided by the author and sponsors, the loss in funding is a result of the federal HR 1's elimination of the SNAP-Education (SNAP-Ed) program, a federally funded nutrition education program.

- c) **Prevalence of food insecurity.** According to a publication by the USDA titled "Food Security in the United States – Key Statistics & Graphics", 13.7% (18.3 million) of U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2024. Household food insecurity affected 18.4% (6.7 million) of households with children in 2024.

According to the 2024 CHIS, 47.2% of California adults earning less than 200% of the FPL — \$30,120 for a single adult and \$62,400 for a family of four — were food insecure.

- d) **What does this bill do?** This bill requires DPH to establish a two-year pilot in collaboration with UCLA to fund the food security questions within CHIS. The bill also requires UCLA to publish the data available statewide, regional and county level data as feasible and post the data on the AskCHIS reporting tool in a manner accessible to the public, which is already an existing practice. Further, this bill also expands the range of households sampled from 200% up to 400% of FPL. This expansion would capture a larger range of households who may be experiencing food insecurity. The bill is contingent upon appropriation by the Legislature and is not applicable to UCLA unless approved by the UC Regents.
 - e) **Accompanying budget request.** The author has submitted a budget request to fund the food insecurity questions and expand the range of households from 200% to 400% FPL.
- 3) **SUPPORT.** This bill is sponsored by the California Association of Food Banks (CAFB) and the San Francisco-Marin Food Bank (SFMFB), who write in support that the CHIS study, unique to California, has been a valuable supplement alongside the CPS-FSS. CAFB and SFMFB continue that CHIS also measures food security and it is able to reach several Asian and Latine subpopulations that the USDA survey could not, and has also enabled analyses of the relationships between food security and health or social conditions, as well as comparisons of counties and regions within the state. CAFB and SFMFB highlight that in early January 2026, it was announced that funding to conduct the food insecurity screener by CHIS was also cut, resulting from the loss of SNAP-Ed funding. CAFB and SFMFB state that this removes a second key source of data on food security in California. CAFB and SFMFB highlight that it is imperative that we not only bring back the ability of CHIS to measure food security but also expand the range of households sampled from 200% up to 400% of FPL. CAFB and SMFBMB note that the Brookings Institution estimates that one-third of all food-insecure households have incomes over 200% FPL, and a USDA study shows that households earning more than 1.85 times the federal poverty threshold make up about 20% of all food-insecure households, meaning many families earning nearly twice the

200% FPL benchmark, or roughly \$128,000 for a family of four, still struggle. By funding and expanding CHIS to include households up to 400% FPL, California would retain the tools needed to better understand and combat food insecurity for a larger share of the population at risk. CAFB and SFMFB conclude that California cannot stand by while harmful federal policies eliminate critical tools in our ability to understand and design proven solutions to hunger.

4) RELATED LEGISLATION.

- a) AB 1618 (Rogers) would require the State Department of Social Services (DSS) to conduct an annual survey on food insecurity across the state. AB 1618 passed the Assembly Human Services Committee with a vote of 6-0 on March 10, 2026.
- b) SB 1025 (Hurtado) would establish the Office of Food Security and Affordability to coordinate statewide food insecurity outreach, partnerships, research, and emergency response efforts, as specified. Would create the Food Security and Affordability Fund for the receipt and deposit of moneys from federal, state, local, or private sources, and upon appropriation by the Legislature, authorizes the office to use those moneys to implement and administer these provisions. SB 1025 is pending before the Senate Human Services and Governmental Organization Committees.

5) PREVIOUS LEGISLATION.

- a) AB 1967 (Jackson) of 2024, would have established a Food Insecurity Officer within DSS to coordinate and address food insecurity across state government operations. AB 1967 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.
- b) SB 628 referenced in the Background section above declares that it is the established policy of the state that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food. Requires all relevant state agencies to consider this state policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations, and grant criteria when those policies, regulations, and grant criteria are pertinent to the distribution of sufficient affordable food.

- 6) **DOUBLE REFERRAL.** This bill is double referred, upon passage in this Committee, it will be referred to the Assembly Committee on Higher Education.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Association of Food Banks (sponsor)
 San Francisco-Marín Food Bank (sponsor)
 California Food Recovery Coalition
 Californians for SSI
 Community Action Marin
 Edgewood Center for Children and Families
 Extrafood
 Food for People, the Food Bank for Humboldt County
 Glad Tidings Church — Assemblies of God

GLIDE

Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties

Justice in Aging

Menorah Park

Mission Language Vocational School

North Marin Community Services

Nourish California

Ritter Center

Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County

The Richmond Neighborhood Center

Numerous individuals

Opposition

None on file

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