

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 1996 (Bonta)
As Introduced February 17, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Establishes the California Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (Council) within the California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS) to develop and publish a plan with annual benchmarks to reduce child poverty by 50% within 10 years and to evaluate the impacts of state budgets, legislation, and policies on children and families.

Major Provisions

- 1) Establishes the Council within CalHHS and requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide staff for, and administer, the Council.
- 2) Requires the Council to convene no later than April 1, 2027, and to be cochaired by the Secretary of CalHHS or their designee and the Director of CDSS or their designee.
- 3) Requires the Council to be made up of 18 members, as follows:
 - a) The Governor shall appoint 14 members to the Council, including all of the following:
 - i) One representative from each of the following: CDSS; the California Department of Health Care Services; the California Department of Education; the State Board of Education; the California Interagency Council on Homelessness; the California Cradle-to-Career Data System; a county or regional human services agency; a statewide nonprofit focused on ending child poverty; a California Promise Neighborhood or similar place-based initiative; and, an organization representing immigrant families;
 - ii) Two individuals with lived experience of child or family poverty; and,
 - iii) One youth representative who is 16 to 25 years of age, inclusive;
 - b) The Speaker of the Assembly shall appoint two members to the Council; and,
 - c) The President pro Tempore of the Senate shall appoint two members to the Council.
- 4) Requires members of the Council to serve without compensation except for reimbursement of reasonable travel expenses.
- 5) Provides that a vacancy occurs upon the resignation, death, removal, or failure of a member to attend three consecutive meetings without good cause. Authorizes an appointing authority to remove a member for misconduct, neglect of duty, chronic nonattendance, change of employment, conflict of interest, or conduct inconsistent with the mission of the Council. Requires a vacancy to be filled by the original appointing authority within 60 days.
- 6) Prohibits a vacant seat from being counted toward a quorum.
- 7) Requires the Council to do all of the following:

- a) Develop and publish a comprehensive plan with annual benchmarks to reduce statewide child poverty by 50% within 10 years;
- b) Evaluate the impacts of policy proposals, including, but not limited to, expansion of refundable tax credits, guaranteed income or cash plus supports, affordable and subsidized childcare, housing and homelessness prevention, nutrition programs, behavioral health supports, workforce, and living wage pathways;
- c) Submit an analysis of proposed budget provisions expected to affect child poverty and child well-being within 10 days of the release of both the Governor's annual Budget Proposal and the May Revision;
- d) Review major changes to the state budget for potential impacts on children and families within 90 days of the enactment of the annual Budget Act;
- e) Analyze pending legislation for impacts on children upon request of the Council chairs, the Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly, or the President pro Tempore of the Senate, or by majority vote of the Council;
- f) Identify state programs or administrative processes that can be modified to reduce barriers to access and improve equity for children and families;
- g) Hold at least four regional public hearings, including hearings during nontraditional hours to maximize participation by working families; and,
- h) Submit all of the following reports to the Legislature: an initial report by July 1, 2027; comprehensive recommendations by January 1, 2028; and, a progress report every two years, beginning July 1, 2029.

COMMENTS

Background: *Poverty in California*. Despite California's large economy and substantial public investments in programs that support families, many children continue to experience poverty or economic hardship. According to the August 2025 Public Policy Institute of California fact sheet, *Poverty in California*,¹ the state's poverty rate increased from 15.2% in 2022 to 16.9% in 2023 under the California Poverty Measure, which accounts for the regional cost of living and the effects of safety-net programs. This represents approximately 6.4 million Californians living below the poverty level. Child poverty rose from 15.2% in 2022 to 17.6% in 2023, returning to roughly its pre-COVID-19 pandemic level after temporary relief programs expired.

Research shows that poverty can significantly affect children's development and long-term outcomes. Children growing up in low-income households are more likely to experience unstable housing, food insecurity, and limited access to quality early learning opportunities and healthcare, which shape early development.² Economic hardship can also increase stress within families, affecting children's social-emotional development, cognitive growth, and school readiness. These early disparities can contribute to differences in academic achievement,

¹ <https://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/>

² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12448094/>

educational attainment, health outcomes, and lifetime earnings. Conversely, safety net programs play a significant role in reducing poverty. In 2023, programs such as CalFresh, tax credits, housing subsidies, and school meals kept an estimated 2.6 million Californians, including about one million children, out of poverty. Without safety nets, poverty would be even higher, especially among children.

Reducing Child Poverty. California administers a number of public assistance programs to uplift those out of poverty. Many of those programs are federally funded, housed within CDSS and administered by counties, including CalFresh, CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal. Each county works to determine eligibility under federal and state standards and then helps disburse aid to recipients. In addition to core federal programs, California has various state programs aimed at reducing child poverty through income supports, nutrition assistance, and early childhood programs, including tax credits such as the CalEIT and Young Child Tax Credit, access to subsidized childcare and preschool, and access to food assistance for immigrants, among others.

Impacts of H.R. 1 on Child Poverty. On July 1, 2025, H.R. 1 was signed into law, which is expected to significantly affect children in families receiving public benefits by reducing eligibility, lowering benefit levels, and increasing administrative barriers across key safety net programs. Specifically, H.R. 1 includes substantial cuts to the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides food assistance benefits to low-income families. It introduced stricter work requirements and eliminated eligibility for certain lawfully present immigrants. These changes may result in reduced or terminated benefits for households with children and are projected to decrease SNAP participation, with estimates indicating that households with approximately 500,000 children could see benefit reductions of about \$100 per month and that up to 1.3 million individuals, including children, could lose assistance.³

Other changes in H.R. 1 include cuts to Medicaid and restrictions on refundable tax credits, which are expected to increase the number of children facing barriers to health coverage and income supports, compounding economic instability for low-income families. Because participation in SNAP and Medicaid is a pathway for automatic enrollment in free or reduced-price school meals, reductions in program eligibility are expected to decrease the number of children who qualify for school nutrition programs, potentially disrupting access to consistent meals during the school year and summer months.⁴ These changes are expected to increase food insecurity, reduce access to essential services, and place additional fiscal and administrative pressure on states, which may further constrain their ability to maintain or expand programs that support children and families.

This bill establishes the California Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council within CalHHS to develop a statewide plan and benchmarks to reduce child poverty by 50% within 10 years, and to evaluate the impacts of state budgets, legislation, and policies on children and families.

According to the Author

"[This bill] is grounded in the principle that every child in California deserves to grow up with stability, dignity, and access to the resources necessary to thrive. Yet today, nearly one in five children lives in a household struggling to afford basic necessities like housing, food, and

³ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-budget/2025-budget-impacts-house-bill-would-cut-assistance-for-children-raise>

⁴ <https://schoolnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/TAM-25-SNA-BBB-Bill-Summary.pdf>

healthcare—placing immense strain on families and limiting opportunities for youth through no fault of their own. As pandemic-era supports have expired and federal cuts loom, families are being asked to do more with less, and the consequences are immediate and real. The impacts are visible every day: missed meals, delayed care, preventable health inequities, and chronic stress that disproportionately burden communities already facing systemic barriers. While California has demonstrated that targeted investments can reduce child poverty, the state currently lacks a coordinated structure to sustain and build on that progress. [This bill] addresses this gap by establishing a Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council to promote accountability, align policy efforts, and ensure that the needs of children and families remain central in budget and legislative decisions. By setting a clear goal of reducing child poverty by 50 % over the next 10 years, this bill advances an equity-driven, data-informed approach to improving outcomes for children statewide.”

Arguments in Support

End Child Poverty California, sponsor of the bill, writes, “The ECPCA Coalition itself was a response to the passage of the Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty Act (AB 1520, 2017). The culmination of a multi-year advocacy campaign, this legislation was a milestone accomplishment of grassroots activism and community leadership. AB 1520’s main deliverable was a comprehensive framework to reduce child and family poverty in California. This framework, the End Child Poverty Plan, handed the Coalition our first policy agenda. The Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty Task Force Report, overseen by now Secretary Kim Johnson, identified 43 evidence-based recommendations aimed at reducing child poverty and reducing child poverty in the state.

“As a catalyst for increased investment in child and family-first policies, the End Child Poverty Plan was incredibly successful. Since 2017, our coalition has been able to achieve full or partial progress on 41 of the 43 recommendations. California has invested billions to lift children and families out of poverty.

“However, child poverty rates have already partly rebounded due to one-time solutions falling away, many sectors of the economy continued struggle in the post-pandemic era, and now the latest impact due to H.R. 1 cuts... We are at an inflection point. With the impending ramifications of H.R.1 expected to push millions more into poverty and widen existing racial disparities, California has an opportunity to counter the federal administration’s harmful, regressive policies and continue progress toward a more equitable future. Bold investments are needed to achieve this vision, and the time to act is now.

“California must not lose sight of its moral compass and north star agenda to end child poverty across the state. California must continue to utilize a data-driven approach to smart, effective policy development and evaluation. [This bill] will put us back on a pathway to tracking our progress on ending child poverty.”

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee on April 29, 2026:

- 1) CDSS estimates, beginning April 1, 2027, ongoing General Fund (GF) costs of an unknown amount, but likely in the mid-hundreds of thousands to low millions of dollars annually for three to seven full-time staff positions to staff and administer to Council, including providing research, evaluation, and impact assessments, and supporting the logistics of four annual public hearings.
- 2) Additional GF costs of an unknown amount to provide travel reimbursement to Council members. For context, if each of the 20 Council members received \$100 for each of four public hearings, annual costs would be \$8,000.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

VOTES

ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 7-0-0

YES: Lee, Castillo, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson, Solache, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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