
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Becker, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 1996
Author: Bonta
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Consultant: Naima Ford Antal
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Fiscal: Yes

Subject: California Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council

SUMMARY

This bill establishes the California Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council and requires the council to create benchmarks and metrics that measure California's progress toward reducing child poverty by 50% in 10 years.

ABSTRACT

Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes, in federal law, the Promise Neighborhood program, which provides grants to nonprofit organizations, tribal organizations, or institutions of higher education, which, together with partners, develop and implement plans to significantly improve outcomes of children living in a given neighborhood. (*20 United States Code 7274*)
- 2) Establishes the "California Cradle-to-Career Data Systems Act," which expresses legislative intent to build a data system that services students and families by identifying and tracking predictive indicators to enable parents, teachers, health and human services providers, and policymakers to provide appropriate interventions and supports to address disparities in opportunities and improve outcomes for all students. (*Education Code 10850 et seq.*)
- 3) Establishes the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program to provide cash assistance and other social services for low-income families through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Under CalWORKs, each county provides assistance through a combination of state, county, and federal TANF funds. (*Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 11200 et seq.*)
- 4) Establishes the CalFresh program to administer the provision of federal SNAP benefits to families and individuals meeting specified criteria. (*WIC 18900 et seq.*)
- 5) Requires the Governor to create an Interagency Council on Homelessness. (*WIC 8257 et seq.*)

- 6) Makes findings and declarations establishing the Homeless Youth Act of 2018 to improve prevention and early intervention services for youth at risk of experiencing homelessness and increase access to services for youth experiencing homelessness. (*WIC 8259*)
- 7) Requires CDSS to administer the California Guaranteed Income Pilot Program to provide grants to eligible entities for the purpose of administering pilot programs and projects that provide a guaranteed income to participants. (*WIC 18997*)
- 8) Requires CDSS to work with the State Department of Education to maximize participation in the federal Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children program (*WIC 18901.57*)
- 9) Requires public assistance program recipients to be supplied with information regarding their potential eligibility for the federal and California Earned Income Tax Credit, Young Child Tax Credit and Foster Youth Tax Credit. (*Revenue and Taxation Code 19854*)

This Bill:

- 1) Makes findings and declarations about the impact of child poverty and the intent of the Legislature to reduce child poverty by 50% within 10 years.
- 2) Establishes the California Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (Council) within the California Health and Human Services Agency.
- 3) Requires CDSS to provide staff for and administer the Council.
- 4) Requires the Council to convene no later than April 1, 2027.
- 5) Requires the Council to be co-chaired by both the Secretary of California Health and Human Services or their designee and the Director of Social Services or their designee.
- 6) Requires the Council to be made up of 19 members, as follows:
 - a. Fourteen members appointed by the Governor including executive-level representatives from each of the following:
 - i. CDSS.
 - ii. The State Department of Health Care Services.
 - iii. The State Department of Education.
 - iv. The State Board of Education.
 - v. The State Department of Finance.
 - vi. The California Interagency Council on Homelessness.

- vii. The California Cradle-to-Career Data System.
 - viii. The First 5 Association of California.
 - ix. A county or regional human services agency.
 - x. A statewide nonprofit focused on ending child poverty.
 - xi. A California Promise Neighborhood or similar place-based initiative.
 - xii. An organization representing immigrant families.
- b. Two individuals with lived experience of child or family poverty.
 - c. One youth representative who is 16 to 25 years of age, inclusive.
 - d. Two members appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly.
 - e. Two members appointed by the President pro Tempore of the Senate.
- 7) Requires members of the Council to serve without compensation except for reimbursement of reasonable travel expenses.
- 8) States that a vacancy occurs upon the resignation, death, removal, or failure of a member to attend three consecutive meetings without good cause.
- 9) Permits 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 and requires the vacancy to be filled by the original appointing authority within 60 days.
- 10) Prohibits a vacant seat from counting toward a quorum.
- 11) Requires the Council to determine where there is overlap of existing child poverty reduction or child welfare commissions and reports and develop a comprehensive plan for reducing redundancy. The plan shall include annual benchmarks to reduce statewide child poverty by 50% within 10 years.
- 12) Requires the Council to determine metrics to measure whether a policy proposal, budget provisions, or pending legislation increases or decreases child poverty. Policy proposals include, but are 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.
- 13) Requires the Council to determine metrics to measure whether a policy proposal, budget provision, or pending legislation increases or decreases administrative burdens for families with children.

- 14) Requires the Council to identify state programs or administrative processes that can be modified to reduce barriers to access and improve equity for children and families.
- 15) Requires the Council to hold at least four regional public hearings, including hearings during nontraditional hours to maximize participation by working families.
- 16) Requires the Council to submit all of the following reports to the Legislature:
 - a. An initial report by July 1, 2027.
 - b. Comprehensive recommendations by January 1, 2028.
 - c. A progress report every two years, beginning July 1, 2029.
- 17) Requires all the reports listed above to be submitted in compliance with Section 9795 of the Government Code.

FISCAL IMPACT

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 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.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Bill:

According to the author, “AB 1996 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 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. AB 1996 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 percent over the next 10 years, this bill advances an equity-driven, data-informed approach to improving outcomes for children statewide.”

Poverty in California

Poverty impacts the health and well-being of families and, by extension, the neighborhoods and communities in which they live. According to the American Psychological Association, poverty effects children in deep and long lasting ways both mentally and physically including being at “greater risk than higher-income children for a range of cognitive, emotional, and health-related problems, including detrimental effects on executive functioning, below average academic achievement, poor social emotional functioning, developmental delays, behavioral problems, asthma, inadequate nutrition, low birth weight, and higher rates of pneumonia.”¹

In California, poverty rates are measured using the California Poverty Measure, created by the Public Privacy Institute of California (PPIC) and Stanford Center on Poverty and Equality. The California Poverty Measure showed that poverty has increased back to pre-pandemic levels, rising from 15.2% in 2022 to 16.9% in 2023 (the most recent data available). The report also estimates that 2.7 million more people would have been in poverty if it were not for safety net programs like CalFresh and the Earned Income Tax Credit. Nationally, children are more likely to live in poverty than adults which is why many safety net programs prioritize families with children.

California’s Safety Net

According to End Poverty in California, “the safety net’s job is to undo the poverty and disparities wrought by other institutions” by providing financial and programmatic support to people already experiencing poverty or economic need.² In California, the safety net includes numerous programs that provide a mix of supports and services including cash grants, nutritional support, housing assistance, and tax credits. These programs include CalFresh, CalWORKs, school lunch programs, the Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program, state and federal Earned Income Tax Credit, the child tax credit, General Assistance, and Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment.

These programs help millions of Californians each year. According to PPIC, the federal Earned Income Tax Credit lowered poverty rates in 2023, by 2.3 points among children and CalFresh prevented 3.7% more children from living in poverty. Additionally, CalWORKs and General assistance together lowered California’s child poverty rate by 0.9%.³

The majority of safety net programs have stringent and unique eligibility criteria with different application and access points, which make programs difficult to navigate and attain for families

¹ www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/poverty-hunger-homelessness-children

² <https://endpovertyinca.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/policy-paper.pdf>

³ Bohn, Sarah, Caroline Danielson, Matt Levin, Marybeth Mattingly, & Christopher Wimer. Poverty in California. August 2025. www.ppica.org/publication/poverty-in-california/

who need support, especially when compounded with the chronic stress of living in poverty.⁴ This bill will require the Council to create metrics that evaluate whether policy proposals increase or decrease these types of administrative burdens for families with children.

Lifting Children and Families out of Poverty Task Force

AB 1520 (*Burke, Chapter 415, Statutes of 2017*) created the Lifting Children and Families out of Poverty Task Force (Task Force) to identify comprehensive strategies aimed at addressing deep childhood poverty and reducing child poverty in California. As a part of this effort, the Task Force examined strategies to better coordinate services, noting that families in poverty often have an array of service needs, but linking families with support services can be challenging due to disparate eligibility rules across programs and families' lack of time to find and apply for services they could be eligible for. The Task Force drew from the research support of Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality as well as state departments and stakeholders. It also convened meetings, discussions, and subcommittees that created a list of recommendations to reduce child poverty by 50%. The final Task Force report, the End Child Poverty Plan, was published in 2018 and notes that:

Coordinated services programs aim to combine services for parents and their children to support parent economic security, supportive parenting, and children's healthy development. By focusing on the immediate risks facing these families (such as medical conditions and income instability) and simultaneously providing parenting education or access to early childhood education, coordinated services programs seek to move families out of poverty in the short-term and decrease the chance that poverty will continue into the next generation. These broad and sustained services are a response to the evidence on brief, narrowly focused programs, which have shown only modest and short-term effects.⁵

Recommendations to address both immediate and long-term needs include increased tax credits, larger CalWORKs grants, expanded Medi-Cal eligibility and more child care and early education access. The Task Force reported that the phase-in of their recommendations would cost \$1.4 billion in 2019–20, \$3.5 billion in 2020–21, and \$5.6 billion in 2021–22 but would ultimately create \$12 billion in benefits to state and local government as children exit poverty and become successful adults. According to the End Child Poverty California coalition, 41 of the 43 recommendations have now been partially or fully implemented. It should be noted that these estimates are based on the Medi-Cal and CalFresh program before changes in federal law made by H.R. 1 (Public Law 119-21), which will make it harder for families to remain eligible for these programs.

This bill will create a Council that would have a similar mission to the Task Force but be a permanent entity housed in the Health and Human Services Agency. It will also create metrics that can be used to determine whether a policy proposal will increase or decrease childhood poverty and the administrative burden on families in poverty.

⁴ Francis, L., DePriest, K., Wilson, M., & Gross, D. Child Poverty, Toxic Stress, and Social Determinants of Health: Screening and Care Coordination. Online journal of issues in nursing, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.3912/OJIN.Vol23No03Man02>

⁵ California Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty Task Force Report: Recommended Strategies to Address Deep Child Poverty and Child Poverty in California, November 2018.

Federal Promise Neighborhoods

One recommendation of the Task Force was to create 20 new Promise Neighborhoods throughout California. Promise Neighborhoods are a federally funded effort to provide holistic, place-based approaches to reducing poverty and improving economic, social, and academic outcomes in disadvantaged communities. According to the Lifting Children and Families out of Poverty Task Force, “Promise Neighborhoods tailor their specific set of cradle-to-college-and-career solutions to the local context, but each share the following characteristics: results-driven focus on impacting population-level results; place-based to focus on a specific high-need geography; collective impact is achieved through partnerships; [...] and most importantly, Promise Neighborhoods implement a comprehensive cradle-to-college-and-career continuum that addresses all of a family’s needs to help them move out of poverty.” Additionally, the Task Force noted that the model is community-powered, relies on both public and private investments, and is equity-focused.⁶

Further, current cradle-to-career approaches have achieved impressive results in California. These results include:

- Chula Vista Promise Neighborhood: An average of 91% kindergarten readiness rate for the past six years, and an increase in the number of households that have access to primary care-based medical services from 89% to 97%.
- Corning Everett Freeman Promise Neighborhood: An increase in the number of students grades 3 through 8 and grade 11 who met or exceeded state standards in math from 20% to 24%, and an increase in Corning Union High School District’s graduation rate from 84% to 90%.
- Hayward Promise Neighborhood: A 32% increase in Hayward Unified School District graduates enrolling in or transferring to California State University East Bay, and a decrease of its high school drop-out rate from 22% to 8%.

This bill includes representatives from Promise Neighborhoods on the Council.

Current Commissions and Reports

There are currently several commissions and boards that support child anti-poverty efforts. These groups advise the Governor, the Legislature, and other cabinet level executives and are often required to create reports with recommendations. Some examples of these groups include:

- The Child Welfare Council: The council serves as an advisory body responsible for improving the collaboration and processes of the multiple agencies and the courts that serve the children in the child welfare system.

⁶ ibid

- The Cradle-to-Career Data System Governing Board: The board oversees the cradle-to-career data system and includes representatives from data providers, policymakers, and the community.
- The Early Childhood Policy Council: The council advises the Governor, Legislature and the Superintendent of Public Instruction on statewide early learning, care and child development. It also provides recommendations on all aspects of the state's early childhood system.
- The Hope, Opportunity, Perseverance and Empowerment (HOPE) for Children Trust Account Program Board: The Board oversees the implementation of the HOPE Program, a new financial investment program specifically catered to vulnerable children throughout the state.
- The Advisory Committee on Before and After School Programs: The committee provides information and advice to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the State Board of Education regarding state and federal policy and funding issues affecting before and after school programs, based on regular and systematic input from providers.
- The Office of Youth and Community Restoration: The office guides the transition from state-run youth incarceration to county care by identifying and sharing best practices to help inform rehabilitative and restorative youth support and offering technical assistance to advise those in the space on how to achieve outcomes and system improvements for youth across the justice system.

This bill would require the California Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council to analyze the various boards, commissions, and committees in state government that promote child welfare and identify where there is redundancy.

Related/Prior Legislation:

AB 1969 (Bonta, 2026) would establish the It Takes a Village Act of 2026 which creates the California Coordinated Neighborhood and Community Services Grant Program to be administered by CDSS or another department within the California Health and Human Services Agency, as designated by the Secretary of California Health and Human Services. AB 1969 is set to be heard in this committee on June 15, 2026.

AB 132 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 144, Statutes of 2021) establishes the Cradle-to-Career Data System to link data on student progress through education, workforce training, employment, health and social services; establishes a governing board comprised of 21 members; and, establishes the Office of Cradle-to-Career Data within Government Operations Agency until July 1, 2026, among other things.

AB 932 (Levine, 2021) would have established the Cradle-to-Career Grant Program to administer public and private funds to address child poverty and achievement gaps in California children. AB 932 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.

SB 686 (Allen, 2019) would have enacted the California Promise Neighborhoods Act of 2019, which would have provided grants, administered by the State Department of Education, to implement a comprehensive integrated continuum of cradle-to-college-to-career solutions, including academic, health, and social programs. AB 686 was set to be heard in the Assembly Education Committee, but the hearing was canceled at the request of the author.

AB 1520 (Burke, Chapter 415, Statutes of 2017) created the Lifting Children and Families out of Poverty Task Force to identify comprehensive strategies aimed at addressing deep childhood poverty and reducing child poverty in California.

COMMENTS

AB 1996 creates the California Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council to oversee the state’s efforts to reduce child poverty. In 2018, the Lifting Children Out of Poverty Task Force created a report and framework of recommendations that led to impactful changes. This bill could continue that work by creating a council that will consider every aspect of a child’s well-being including health, housing, education, nutrition, and community supports with the goal of reducing child poverty by 50%. The Council will also create metrics that can be used to measure how policy decisions will impact child poverty. The Council’s focus on reducing redundancy and creating objective metrics could reinforce and advance the work started by the Lifting Children Out of Poverty Task Force.

PRIOR VOTES

Assembly Floor:	72 - 0
Assembly Appropriations Committee:	15 - 0
Assembly Human Services Committee:	7 - 0

POSITIONS

Support:

- Grace INC (Sponsor)
- California Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
- First 5 Association of California
- Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA)
- Oakland Unified School District

Oppose:

None received

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