
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 79
Author: Arambula (D)
Amended: 3/24/25 in Assembly
Vote: 21

SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 5-0, 6/30/25

AYES: Arreguín, Ochoa Bogh, Becker, Limón, Pérez

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 7-0, 7/9/25

AYES: Pérez, Ochoa Bogh, Cabaldon, Choi, Cortese, Gonzalez, Laird

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25

AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 69-0, 5/29/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Public social services: higher education

SOURCE: California Association of Food Banks

DIGEST: This bill requires a county human services agency to seek input from basic needs directors, basic needs coordinators, or designated staff from each campus of a public institution of higher education about the protocol for engagement between the agency and the campus about CalFresh, CalWORKs, and other county administered benefits. The bill also requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to create a training for basic needs coordinators, create a workgroup to share basic need center best practices, and regularly submit a report to the Legislature on the impact of basic needs centers on student achievement.

ANALYSIS:

Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to promote the general welfare and to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the nation's population by raising the levels of nutrition among low-income households. (7 USC 2011 et seq.)
- 2) Prohibits a person who is enrolled in an institution of higher education at least half time from participating in SNAP unless they qualify for one of a number of exemptions. (7 CFR 273.5 (a))
- 3) Establishes in the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Act a system for the distribution and use of public assistance benefits, such as CalWORKs and CalFresh, and requires EBT access to be provided through automated teller machines (ATMs), point-of-sale devices and other devices that accept EBT transactions. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 10065 et seq.)
- 4) Establishes the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program within California to provide TANF funds for welfare-to-work services to eligible families. (WIC 11200 et seq.)
- 5) Establishes the CalFresh program to administer the provision of federal SNAP benefits to families and individuals meeting specified criteria. (WIC 18900 et seq.)
- 6) Requires each community college, by July 1, 2022, to establish a position of the Basic Needs Coordinator to be the point of contact for students experiencing basic needs insecurity, and establish a basic needs center to provide basic needs services and resources to students. Defines "basic needs services and resources" as including but not limited to, housing, food, clothing, feminine hygiene, diapers, technology, childcare, and mental health services and resources. Defines "coordinator" means a basic needs coordinator. (Education Code 66023.5 et seq.)
- 7) Establishes that any report required or requested by law to be submitted by a state or local agency to the Legislature shall instead be submitted to the Secretary of the Senate, Chief Clerk of the Assembly, and the Legislative Counsel, as specified. Requires each report to include a summary of its contents, and requires notice of receipt of the report to be recorded in the journal of the appropriate house or houses of the Legislature. (Government Code 9795)

This bill:

- 1) Makes findings and declarations about housing and food insecurity among college students.
- 2) States it is the intent of the legislature to eliminate inconsistency in rejections and acceptances for public social services programs based on student income and work requirements and breakdown local silos to share best practices.
- 3) Requires a county human services agency to seek input from basic needs directors, basic needs coordinators, or designated staff from each campus of a public institution of higher education about a protocol for engagement between the agency and campus to provide information about public benefit programs and services that may be available to students.
- 4) Requires CDSS to do all of the following:
 - a) In consultation with staff liaisons and basic needs directors, basic needs coordinators, or other designated professional staff from institutions of public higher education within the county, develop a training for basic needs directors. The training must include:
 - i) Local Programs that Increase Employability familiarity.
 - ii) State Department of Health Care Services and CDSS policy updates, including review of the CalFresh Student Eligibility Handbook.
 - iii) Other training related to the needs specific to college students including financial aid, scholarships, dependent status, and eligibility criteria for public social services programs.
 - b) Convene a workgroup that meets quarterly to share best practices, address challenges, and identify statewide issues, comprised of all of the following:
 - i) At least 12 county staff liaisons, comprised of at least two county staff liaisons from each of the six regions of the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) consortium.
 - ii) At least four college campus basic needs directors, basic needs coordinators, or other designated campus staff from multiple regions and campuses.
 - iii) At least one staff member from each higher education segment including but not limited to the office of the Chancellor of the California State University, the Office of the Chancellor of the California Community

- Colleges, and the office of the President of the University of California who is requested to provide a representative for purposes of this workgroup.
- iv) The Center for Healthy Communities at California State University, Chico.
 - v) Relevant stakeholders as needed.
 - c) On or before May 1, 2027, and every three years thereafter, in collaboration with stakeholders identified pursuant to this section, submit a report to the Legislature with findings and recommendations relating to enrollment success trends, best practices, and services offered by the department that may be available to students attending a campus of an institution of public higher education.

Comments

According to the author, “Many college students move hundreds of miles away from home, experience limited family support, and encounter financial complications tied to their scholarship or work requirements. Because these unique circumstances make navigating the complex eligibility requirements of public assistance programs particularly challenging, I authored AB 1326 in 2021 to create a county liaison of higher education to help students navigate these challenges.

“The AB 1326 report confirms a clear lack of coordination across the state and provides key recommendations to enhance collaboration between campuses and county agencies. To ensure that all students receive support, regardless of where they attend university, AB 79 establishes a statewide network of basic needs coordinators and county liaisons of higher education to share best practices.”

CalFresh for College Students College. While CalFresh is the state’s largest anti-hunger program, the federal government prohibits a college student that attends school at least half time from receiving SNAP benefits. There are a number of exceptions to that rule. Students may qualify for CalFresh if they meet certain criteria and fall within both of the following parameters of the federal definition of student: Individuals must be between the ages 18 and 49 and physically and mentally “fit” for employment (individuals who are unable to work because of a disability are exempt from the student requirements). Students must be enrolled at least half-time in regular curriculum at an “institution of higher education” in which the regular curriculum meets the standard requirements for graduation or certification in a particular field of study. Individuals classified as students become

eligible for CalFresh if they meet one of the following requirements: (1) employed 20 hours a week, on average; (2) participating in federal or state work study; (3) full-time student with a child under age 12; (4) part-time student with a child under age six (5) part-time student with a child between ages six and 12 for whom adequate care is not available; (6) receiving CalWORKs; (7) enrolled in a CalFresh employment and training program, or other state or local job training programs that USDA will accept (8) does not intend to register for the next normal school term.

CalWORKs. CalWORKs is the state’s primary cash assistance program for low-income families. In addition to cash assistance, families are provided an array of services that are intended to remove barriers to self-sufficiency. According to the Public Policy Institute of California October 2020 report on Supporting Student Parents in Community College CalWORKs Program, students participating in CalWORKs are more likely to have a better course success rate, experience full-time enrollment, and matriculate to a degree than when not enrolled in college CalWORKs programs.

Students enrolled in California Community Colleges and in CalWORKs can also benefit from programs specifically designed for CalWORKs beneficiaries that are funded by Proposition 98 and TANF block grant funds. Funds are allocated across a range of services: case management and coordination, work-study, child care, job development, and other direct student supports. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, “CalWORKs students are more likely to enroll full-time, successfully complete their coursework, and persist to the next term—all important factors related to college completion—when they are receiving additional services through a college CalWORKs program.” This bill requires CDSS to create a training for basic needs coordinators to ensure they have up to date knowledge about the opportunities and restrictions relevant to college students.

Basic Needs Centers. Complicated program rules appear to create barriers to student access to some of the state’s largest anti-poverty programs, such as CalWORKs, CalFresh and Medi-Cal. The Legislature has taken proactive steps to address the prevalence of student hunger and housing insecurity. In the 2021 budget, the state allocated \$30 million annually to the California Community Colleges for each college to establish a dedicated Basic Needs Center and hire a Basic Needs Coordinator. The 2023 report from the California Community College Chancellor’s Office says 77 community colleges have created Basic Needs Centers and they have collected data from 60 colleges about their impact. More data is expected as the program grows. According to the reports, so far, “64,777 [student] contacts were made by over 47,000 California community college students

accessing basic needs services through the Basic Needs Center. Almost half of all students who accessed Basic Needs Center resources received food insecurity assistance. Transportation services and technology support services were the next most frequent basic need category that was addressed.” Of these, 47,858 were unique student contacts. All 23 California State University campuses and all 10 University of California campuses have a basic needs center. The University of California set five- year goals for its basic needs program.

AB 1326 (Arambula, 2021) required county humans services agencies to create liaisons between the county and campuses and also required a report on their impact on access to services. The report was published by Center for Healthy Communities at California State University Chico. One of the key recommendations was “to enhance collaboration between campuses and county agencies, the report recommends establishing clear partnership guidelines and fostering consistent coordination through structured meetings. This includes quarterly Statewide County Staff Liaison Meetings, an annual Campus-County Best Practice Exchange, and targeted College Student Eligibility Trainings. These gatherings should focus on sharing best practices, addressing challenges, and planning. Sustainable workloads and long-term staff retention are also critical, emphasizing the need for strategies to prevent burnout and turnover at counties and campuses. Expanding staff capacity in high-student population areas will further ensure effective and consistent campus-county partnerships.”¹

This bill would implement that recommendation by creating an advisory group, integrating basic needs coordinators into the planning services for college students at basic needs centers, and requiring a triennial report to ensure best practices are shared between campuses, with county human services agencies, and with policymakers.

Related/Prior Legislation

AB 2033 (Reyes, Chapter 913, Statutes of 2024) requires California State University campuses and requests University of California campuses to create Basic Needs Centers and establish the position of Basic Needs Coordinator, as specified.

AB 2150 (Arambula, 2024) would have required require CDSS, in consultation with staff liaisons and basic needs directors or basic needs coordinators, to develop training on topics related to determining student eligibility for public social

¹ Center for Healthy Communities. AB 1362 Report. December 2024

services and to facilitate that training. AB 2150 was held on the Assembly Appropriations suspense file.

AB 1326 (Arambula, Chapter, Statutes 2021) requires county liaisons to serve as points of contact for academic counselors and other professional staff at higher education campuses located within their counties and to provide information on programs and services offered by the agency that may be available to students attending that institution.

AB 132 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 144, Statutes of 2021) requires each community college by July 1, 2022, to establish a position of the Basic Needs Coordinator to be the point of contact for students experiencing basic needs insecurity, and establish a basic needs center to provide basic needs services and resources to students.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee The CDSS estimates one-time General Fund costs of \$445,000 in 2025-26 and \$433,000 in 2026-27 for state administration.

Unknown potential costs to counties for administration. Costs would be potentially reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/29/25)

California Association of Food Banks (source)
Alliance for Children's Rights
California Competes: Higher Education for a Strong Economy
California State University, Office of the Chancellor
California Women's Law Center
Center for Healthy Communities At California State University Chico
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organization
Community Action Partnership of Orange County
Faculty Association of California's Community Colleges
Feeding San Diego
Food for People, the Food Bank for Humboldt County
Food in Need of Distribution Food Bank
Glide
Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank

Los Angeles Food Policy Council
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
Mazon: a Jewish Response to Hunger
Michelson Center for Public Policy
Nextgen California
San Jose-evergreen Community College District
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County
Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz County
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley
Student Homes Coalition
Uaspire
University of California
University of California Student Association
Western Center on Law & Poverty
Westside Food Bank

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/29/25)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 69-0, 5/29/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Calderon, Carrillo, Castillo, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Stefani, Ta, Valencia, Wallis, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Alvarez, Bryan, Caloza, Chen, Nguyen, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Tangipa, Ward

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