
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 91
Author: Harabedian (D), et al.
Amended: 8/29/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE GOVERNMENTAL ORG. COMMITTEE: 15-0, 6/24/25

AYES: Padilla, Archuleta, Ashby, Blakespear, Cervantes, Choi, Dahle, Hurtado, Jones, Ochoa Bogh, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Wahab, Weber Pierson

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: 13-0, 7/8/25

AYES: Umberg, Niello, Allen, Arreguín, Ashby, Caballero, Durazo, Laird, Stern, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

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

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: State and local agencies: demographic data

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill requires a state or local agency that directly or by contract collects demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of Californians to use separate collection categories and tabulations for major Middle Eastern or North African groups, as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Requires any state agency, board, or commission that directly or by contract collects demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of Californians to

use separate collection categories and tabulations for specified Asian Groups and Pacific Islander groups.

- 2) Requires a state agency, board, or commission to include data on specified collection categories and tabulations in every demographic report on ancestry or ethnic origins of California residents that it publishes or releases.
- 3) Requires the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) and the Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) to use additional separate collection categories and other tabulations for major Asian groups and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander groups.
- 4) Requires the California Department of Corrections to publish its monthly demographic data in a manner disaggregated by race and ethnicity, as specified.
- 5) Requires that a statute that limits the right to access to meetings of public bodies or the writing of public officials and agencies be adopted with findings demonstrating the interest protected by the limitation and the need for protecting that interest.

This bill:

- 1) Requires a state or local agency that directly or by contract collects demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of Californians to use separate collection categories and tabulations for major Middle Eastern or North African groups in a provided form that offers respondents the option of selecting one or more ethnic or racial designation or languages as follows:
 - a) Commencing January 1, 2028, and until collection categories are updated, a state or local agency shall use separate collection categories and tabulations for the following groups:
 - i) A major Middle Eastern group, including, but not limited to, Afghan, Bahraini, Emirati, Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli, Jordanian, Kuwaiti, Lebanese, Omani, Palestinian, Qatari, Saudi Arabian, Syrian, Turkish, and Yemeni.
 - ii) A major North African group, including, but not limited to, Algerian, Djiboutian, Egyptian, Libyan, Mauritanian, Moroccan, Somali, Sudanese, and Tunisian.

- iii) A major transnational Middle Eastern and North African group, including, but not limited to, Amazigh or Berber, Armenian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Circassian, and Kurdish.
- 2) Requires a state or local agency, within 18 months following the release of a decennial census by the United States Census Bureau, a state or local agency to update its collection categories and tabulations to reflect the major Middle Eastern and North African groups.
 - 3) Requires a state or local agency to do both of the following with the data collected:
 - a) Include the data in every demographic report on ancestry or ethnic origins of Californians by the State or local agency that is published on or after January 1, 2029.
 - b) Make the aggregated data available to the public in accordance with state and federal law, including, but not limited to, by publishing the data on its internet website.
 - 4) Prohibits a state or local agency from disclosing personal identifying information about any person whose demographic data is collected pursuant to this bill. The state or local agency may, to prevent the identification of individuals, aggregate data categories at a state, county, city, census tract, or ZIP Code level to facilitate comparisons and identify disparities.
 - 5) Provides that a state or local agency shall not make data available that would result in statistical unreliability.
 - 6) Provides that the Legislature requests the University of California comply with the provisions of this bill.

Background

Author Statement. According to the author’s office, “AB 91 ensures accurate representation of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) individuals by requiring a distinct MENA category in demographic data collection. Currently classified as white, MENA individuals are misrepresented – masking the unique challenges they face and limiting access to targeted resources and support. By disaggregating MENA data, AB 91 equips policymakers, researchers, and service providers with the tools to identify disparities in areas like healthcare, education,

and employment. This bill affirms the MENA community’s distinct identity and supports more equitable policies and outcomes.”

Existing Data Collection for State Agencies. Existing law requires a state agency, board, or commission that directly or by contract collects demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of Californians to use separate collection categories and tabulations for the following:

- Each major Asian group, including, but not limited to, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Laotian, and Cambodian.
- Each major Pacific Islander group, including, but not limited to, Hawaiian, Guamanian, and Samoan.

In addition to the aforementioned requirement, both the Department of Industrial Relations and the Department of Fair Employment and Housing are required to collect and tabulate data for the following:

- Additional major Asian groups, including, but not limited to, Bangladeshi, Hmong, Indonesian, Malaysian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, and Thai.
- Additional major Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander.

This bill requires a state or local agency that directly or by contract collects demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of Californians to use separate collection categories and tabulations for major Middle Eastern or North African groups in a provided form that offers respondents the option of selecting one or more ethnic or racial designation, as specified.

Upcoming Changes to 2030 Census. The 2030 Census will include major changes in how data is collected for people of MENA descent. For the first time, the census will feature a distinct “Middle Eastern or North African” checkbox on the race and ethnicity question. Previously, individuals from these backgrounds were categorized as “White,” often obscuring their unique needs and experiences. In addition, the 2030 Census will use a combined race and ethnicity question—rather than two separate ones—allowing people to select multiple identities that reflect their background more accurately.

This change stems from updated federal standards issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in March 2024, which require all federal agencies to adopt the new format. Agencies must not only include the broader category, but also collect detailed subgroup information, such as Lebanese, Iranian, or Egyptian

origin. These updates aim to improve visibility for the more than 3.5 million Americans with MENA heritage, helping ensure fair access to government programs, civil rights protections, and funding decisions.

The Census Bureau is currently testing the new question formats and conducting outreach to educate the public on how to respond. Agencies have up to five years to fully implement the changes. This marks a significant step toward more inclusive and accurate representation of America's increasingly diverse population.

Data Disaggregation. Disaggregation of data refers to the breaking down of information into smaller units or variables for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of trends and patterns. Proponents of data disaggregation argue that when data is disaggregated, it provides a “full picture” and enhances the understanding of a situation. In addition, proponents argue that policymakers are better equipped to understand the challenges and issues of particular communities and thus better able to respond to those challenges.

The importance of disaggregated data can span multiple sectors. In education, it can reveal achievement gaps between different student demographics. In public health, it helps tailor interventions for communities disproportionately affected by diseases or lacking access to care. In environmental justice, it can pinpoint which neighborhoods face the highest exposure to pollution or climate risks. Disaggregated data also enhances accountability and supports the development of policies that are responsive to the unique needs of diverse populations.

Related/Prior Legislation

SB 435 (Gonzalez, 2024) would have required the State Department of Social Services, in the course of collecting demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of California residents for any report on the CalFresh program, to use separate collection categories and tabulations for each major Latino group, Mesoamerican Indigenous nation, and Mesoamerican Indigenous language, as specified. (Vetoed by Governor Newsom)

AB 943 (Kalra, Chapter 459, Statutes of 2023) requires the California Department of Corrections to publish its monthly demographic data in a manner disaggregated by race and ethnicity, as specified.

AB 2089 (Holden, 2024) would have required a city or county to include additional tabulations for Black or African American groups when collecting

demographic data about its employees, as specified. (Held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee Suspense File)

AB 2763 (Essayli, 2024) would have required a state agency that directly or by contract collects demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of California to use separate collections for the Middle Eastern and North African group, as specified. (Held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee Suspense File)

H.R. 30 (Essayli, 2024) encouraged the federal Office of Management and Budget to include “Middle Eastern or North African” ancestry as a response option on all federal forms collecting demographic information.

AB 1358 (Muratsuchi, 2021) would have expanded the requirements on certain state agencies to collect disaggregated ethnicity data and standardize the collection and tabulation of demographic information by local health officers and health care providers. (Held in the Senate Appropriations Committee Suspense File)

AB 1088 (Eng, Chapter 689, Statutes of 2011) required certain state agencies to collect and tabulate data for additional major Asian groups, as listed, in order to better reflect the diversity of Asian American, Hawaiian and Pacific islander Communities in California.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, unknown potentially significant one-time costs, totaling in the millions of dollars, for state agencies to update demographic data collection policies and to collect and report on this data (General Fund and various special funds). Actual costs to each impacted agency or department will depend on, among other things, the extent they may absorb this workload or other IT expenses within existing resources.

Additionally, unknown potentially significant reimbursable mandate costs for local agencies to update their demographic data collection policies (General Fund). Actual costs to local agencies will depend on, among other things, the extent they are already collecting and tracking this information, and if they would need any IT resources to use separate collection categories for MENA groups. To the extent the Commission on State Mandates determines that any of the provisions of this bill create a new program or impose a higher level of service on local agencies, local agencies could claim reimbursement of those costs.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/28/25)

Joel Anderson, San Diego County Supervisor, District Two
Access California Services
Afghan-American Community Organization
Ahmad Zahra, Councilmember, City of Fullerton
Arab American Anti-discrimination Committee
Arab American Association of New York
Arab American Civic Council
Arab American Heritage Council
Arab Culture and Community Center
Arab Cultural and Community Center in the San Francisco Bay Area
Arab American Engineers and Architects Association
Arts Advocacy Coalition
American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Armenian National Committee of America - Western Region
Armenian-American Action Network
Borderlands for Equity
California Community Foundation
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
Catalyst California
Center on Policy Initiatives
Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy
City and County of San Francisco
City of Albany
City of Anaheim
City of Bell
City of Burbank
City of Fresno
City of Fullerton
City of Garden Grove
City of Glendale
City of Irvine
City of Santa Monica
Community Nexus
Council on American-Islamic Relations, California
County of Orange
Elmahaba Center
Garden Grove School Board Trustee – Walter Muneton
Gay and Lesbian Armenian Society

Global Hope 365
Immigrants are Los Angeles
Imperial Valley Equity and Justice
Iranian American Bar Association
Iranian American Democrats of California
Latino and Muslim Unity
Libyan American Alliance
Malikah
Majdal Arab Community Center of San Diego
MENAarts Newsletter
MENA Arts Advocacy Coalition
Muslim Leadership Council of San Diego
Muslim Public Affairs Council
National Arab American Medical Association
National Iranian American Council Action
National Network for Arab American Communities
Native Element
OMID Multicultural Institute for Development
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans
Qazizada Multicultural Therapy Clinic
Sabil USA
San Diego API Coalition
San Diego County of Superintendent of Schools
Somali Family Service of San Diego
South Asian Network
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Southern California Armenian Democrats
Tunisian United Network
Yemeni Alliance Committee

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/28/25)

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: Supporters of this bill argue that, “AB 91 will enhance government efficiency and reduce waste by correcting the current misclassification of over 950,000 MENA Californians, who are currently categorized as ‘White,’ ‘Asian,’ ‘Black,’ or ‘other.’ This misclassification distorts demographic data, hinders effective service delivery, and inflates the population counts of other racial and ethnic groups, ultimately impairing California’s ability to accurately distribute resources and evaluate needs across all communities in an

equitable manner. More precise data leads to effective policies and tailored interventions. This increase in both efficiency and accuracy supports community resilience and reduces wasteful spending.

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, 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, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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