
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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Subject: Office of Food Security and Affordability

SUMMARY

This bill creates the Office of Food Security and Affordability to develop programs and services that promote food security in California. The bill also creates the position of Director of Food Security and Affordability to serve as administrator of the Office of Food Security and Affordability and creates a Food Security and Affordability Fund.

ABSTRACT

Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes under federal law 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) Declares that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food. (*Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 18700(a)(1)*)
- 3) 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 whether one can acquire enough food to meet the needs of themselves or their household due to lack money or other resources. (*WIC 18700(a)(2)*)
- 4) Requires all relevant state agencies, including but not limited to, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the California Department of Health Care Services, the California Department of Education, and the California Department of Public Health, to consider the right to affordable and healthy food when creating policies or regulation related to the distribution of affordable food. (*WIC 18700(b)*)
- 5) Establishes CalFresh as California's implementation of the SNAP program. (*WIC 18900*)

- 6) Establishes CDSS as the lead agency to partner with the California Department of Education to maximize participation in the federal Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children Program (also known as SUNBucks). (*WIC 18901.57*)
- 7) Requires CDSS, on or before July 1, 2026, to develop a methodology for estimating the CalFresh participation rate and identifying characteristics of Californians who are eligible for, but not receiving, CalFresh benefits, in consultation with specified stakeholders. Requires the department to use that data to develop informed and targeted outreach strategies and to maximize federal funding for CalFresh outreach to reach eligible Californians. (*WIC 18901.58*)
- 8) Allows CDSS to identify data-sharing opportunities with other state and local public entities, and any other unit of state government, for the purposes of improving the administration of CalFresh, increasing CalFresh participation, measuring the impact of CalFresh, and increasing access to critical public health and poverty-alleviating services and other services and benefits available to low-income individuals. Requires CDSS to designate an executive level employee to implement this statute. (*WIC 18901.59*)
- 9) Requires county human services agencies to compile a list of emergency food providers in their area. Allows a county human services agency to elect to refer a CalFresh applicant or recipient to the 2-1-1 dial code to access information on emergency food providers and supplemental food assistance providers, including child nutrition programs, in lieu of providing a list, if it is deemed appropriate. (*WIC 18911(e)*)
- 10) Requires CDSS to establish the California Food Assistance Program which provides food assistance to certain noncitizens of the United States, if the person's immigration status meets the eligibility criteria of SNAP, but the person is not eligible for SNAP benefits solely due to the person's immigration status under Public Law 104-193. (*WIC 18930*)
- 11) Establishes the State Emergency Food Assistance Program, administered by CDSS, to provide food and funding for emergency food to food banks that are established pursuant to the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program and whose ongoing primary function is to facilitate the distribution of food to low-income households. (*WIC 18995*)
- 12) Requires the California Commission on Aging, with the approval of the Secretary of California Health and Human Services, to develop a state plan that includes projects that, five or more days per week, provide at least one meal per day to older Californians, either served in an in-person setting, or provided for to-go pickup to be consumed in a virtual congregate setting. (*WIC 18326*)
- 13) Requires the California Department of Public Health to operate a statewide program to be known as the California Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC Program) to provide nutritional food supplements to low-income pregnant women, low-income postpartum and lactating women, and low-income infants and children under five years of age, who have been determined to be at nutritional risk by a health professional. (*Health and Safety Code 123280*)

- 14) Requires a school district, county superintendent of schools, or charter school maintaining kindergarten or any grades 1 to 12 to make available a nutritionally adequate breakfast and a nutritionally adequate lunch, free of charge, and with adequate time to eat during each schoolday to any pupil who requests a meal without consideration of the pupil's eligibility for a federally funded free or reduced-price meal. (*Education Code (ED) 49501.5*)
- 15) Requires the California Department of Education to work with CDSS to maximize participation in the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children program (SUNBucks program) established by federal law. (*ED 49506*)
- 16) Requires the California Department of Food and Agriculture, with support from CDSS, to establish a grant program designed to expand the use of the electronic benefit transfer (also known as EBT) acceptance systems at California certified farmers' markets or tribe-operated farmer's markets on Indian reservation. (*Food and Agricultural Code 49020*)

This Bill:

- 1) Defines "Director" to mean the Director of Food Insecurity and Affordability.
- 2) Defines "Office" to mean the Office of Food Insecurity and Affordability.
- 3) Creates the Office of Food Security and Affordability in state government.
- 4) Requires the Office to be an independent public entity not affiliated with another state agency. The Office also cannot be under the supervision, direction, or control of another state agency or their officers.
- 5) States that the Director is the administrator and chief executive officer of the Office.
- 6) Requires the Director to be a person qualified by training and experience to perform the duties of the office, work for the office full-time, and receive a salary determined by law.
- 7) Requires the Director to be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.
- 8) Requires, upon a vacancy of the Director position, a new Director be appointed in the same manner as the original appointment. The bill allows the Governor to appoint an acting director but for no longer than six months.
- 9) Requires the Office of Food Insecurity and Affordability to collaborate with relevant departments to:
 - a. Coordinate statewide outreach for food insecurity programs including developing new initiatives.
 - b. Establish and maintain a 24- hour toll free hotline to provide information about food assistance to the public.

- c. Support application processes for food security grants for in- state providers and state agencies.
 - d. Coordinate communication among food banks and emergency food providers.
 - e. Establish best practices for food banks and emergency food providers.
 - f. Cooperate with research organizations and institutions of higher education to maintain ongoing gap analyses of areas underserved by food assistance programs.
 - g. Work with state and community partners to develop and update a strategic plan based on gap analyses.
 - h. Oversee the development and implementation of public- private partnerships.
 - i. Coordinate outreach about assistance to address food insecurity during federally or state- declared emergencies.
 - j. Coordinate food insecurity programming for institutions of higher learning in collaboration with the federal Office of Postsecondary Education.
 - k. Develop outreach campaigns to outreach to seniors, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations.
 - l. Coordinate outreach efforts to individuals who are newly unemployed and may be eligible for food assistance programs.
- 10) Requires the Director of Food Insecurity and Affordability to do the following:
- a. Administer and organize the work of the Office for efficient operation.
 - b. Adopt rules and procedures for the business and administration of the Office.
 - c. Delegate authority to subordinate officers as necessary.
 - d. Appoint and remove staff, subject to applicable civil service laws, as necessary.
 - e. Maintain a headquarters and other offices as needed.
 - f. Solicit and accept grants or funds from federal, state, local or private sources.
 - g. Serve as a liaison between the Office and relevant state agencies including but not limited to CDSS, the California Department of Public Health, the California Department of Education, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture.
 - h. Perform any other functions necessary to carry out the purpose of this title.
- 11) Creates the Food Security and Affordability Fund in the State Treasury for depositing money to implement this bill.

- 12) Requires the Office to use money from this fund, upon appropriation by the Legislature.
- 13) Sunsets this section on January 1, 2037.

FISCAL IMPACT

This bill has not yet been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Bill:

According to the author, “California is the agricultural powerhouse of the nation, producing nearly half of the country’s fruits and vegetables. Yet more than 1 in 5 Californians, approximately 8.8 million people, struggle with food insecurity. Twenty-two percent of households and 27 percent of households with children lack consistent access to enough food for a healthy, active life, with even higher rates among Hispanic/Latine and Black families. Despite significant state investments in programs like CalFresh, WIC, CalWORKs, school nutrition, and emergency food assistance, fragmented administration across multiple agencies has led to uneven outreach, enrollment barriers, and inconsistent coordination. Too many eligible seniors, students, people with disabilities, and working families continue to fall through the cracks.

“SB 1025 establishes the Office of Food Security and Affordability as an independent public entity to bring accountability, coordination, and strategic leadership to California’s hunger response. Led by a Governor-appointed, Senate-confirmed Director, the Office will serve as a centralized hub to align state agencies, reduce inefficiencies, and ensure equitable access to food assistance programs statewide. The Office will expand outreach to increase enrollment, operate a 24-hour hunger hotline, set best practices for food banks and emergency food providers, and conduct data-driven analyses to identify geographic and demographic gaps in service delivery. The bill also creates a dedicated Food Security and Affordability Fund to leverage public and private resources in support of these efforts.

“Food insecurity is not only a moral issue it is a public health, education, and economic stability issue. Rising food costs and a \$2.6 billion annual food budget shortfall highlight the urgency of a coordinated statewide strategy. SB 1025 ensures California takes a comprehensive, equity-centered approach to reducing hunger, strengthening emergency response, and promoting long-term food security. No Californian should have to worry about where their next meal will come from, and this bill moves us closer to making that vision a reality.”

Food Insecurity in California

Food insecurity is a statewide problem that affects people from all backgrounds. While California is the greatest food-producing state in the country, 22% of households and 27% of households with children faced food insecurity in 2024, according to the California Association of Food Banks. Food insecurity disproportionately affects certain communities. According to the

same California Association of Food Banks study, 35% of Black households and 31% of Latino households reported food insecurity in September 2024.¹ According to the Public Policy Institute of California, “Black and Latino households (18%) and households with children (17%) are more likely to experience food insecurity compared to white and Asian American households (7%) and households without children (11%).”²

Because of limited financial resources, those who are food insecure sometimes use cost cutting measures to stretch budgets that are harmful to their health, such as: forgoing the foods needed for special medical diets; purchasing a low-cost diet that relies on foods that are energy-dense but nutrient-poor; diluting or rationing infant formula; and making trade-offs between food and other basic necessities, like housing, utilities, and transportation. Moreover, the impacts of childhood hunger are well known. Children who live in households experiencing food insecurity are at higher risk of health, academic, behavioral, and emotional problems than those who are not.

Food Assistance Programs

There are several food assistance programs operated throughout the state and administered by the California Departments of Aging, California Department of Education, CDSS, California Department of Food and Agriculture, and the California Department of Public Health. CalFresh, California’s version of federal SNAP, provides monthly food benefits to qualified low-income individuals and families to assist with the purchase of the food they need to maintain adequate nutrition levels. With 3.2 million households (and over 5.2 million people) receiving benefits, CalFresh is the largest nutrition assistance program in California. CalFresh benefits have historically been 100 percent federally funded, but recent changes in federal law will soon require states to fund a share of that cost. Income eligibility standards and benefit levels for the program are established by the federal government, with one standard used nationally. CalFresh is administered by CDSS on the state level but applicants and participants are primarily served at the county level. For assistance, participants can call the CalFresh Benefits Helpline or reach out to their county office.

CDSS also administers other nutrition programs like the Child and Adult Care Food Program, a federally funded program that provides free meals in facilities such as child care centers, homeless shelters, adult daycare centers and afterschool care centers, and the California Food Assistance program which provides food assistance to certain noncitizens. CDSS also partners with other departments to administer food assistance programs. For example, CDSS partners with the Department of Education to administer SUNBucks which provides \$40 per month to low-income students during the summer. Also, CDSS and the California Department of Food and Agriculture partner to support Market Match, part of a healthy food incentive program and funded by the California Nutrition Incentive Program. Market Match allows CalFresh recipients that go to participating farmers’ markets receive up to \$15 in matching funds when they buy fruits and vegetables. The farmers are then reimbursed by the state to ensure they are made whole.

¹ www.cafoodbanks.org/food-insecurity-data/

² Thorman, T.; Malagon P. California’s Nutrition Safety Net. Public Policy Institute of California. May, 2025. www.ppic.org/publication/californias-nutrition-safety-net

The California Department of Education independently administers two federally funded meal programs that target school age children, the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. Both programs provide free or reduced priced healthy meals to income eligible students. Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, California became the first state to implement and fully fund a Universal Meals Program for school children grades PK-12. The program allows all students who request a meal to be able to receive free meals regardless of their federal eligibility for free or reduced priced school meals. Students may receive up to two free meals during the school day. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, approximately “3.6 million of California’s 5.8 million public K–12 students are income eligible for federal free or reduced-price meals.”³

California Department of Public Health administers a federally funded program called the California Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). WIC provides, at no cost to participants, supplemental foods, nutrition education, and health care referrals to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age five who are determined to be at nutritional risk. To be eligible for WIC, applicants must be determined by a health professional to be at nutritional risk (i.e., have certain medical-based or diet-based risk conditions). There is also a specific WIC Farmers’ Market Program that allows eligible households to receive \$30 worth of WIC checks to be used at authorized farmers’ markets.

The Department of Aging oversees nutrition programs that provide meals for older adults. These services are typically offered at congregate nutrition sites or through home delivered meals. Both congregate nutrition and home delivered meals serve broad populations, with preference given to those in the greatest economic or social need. These programs are administered by Area Agencies on Aging through Community-Based Adult Services, Adult Day Services, Multi-Purpose Senior Services Programs, and other services. Federally funded Home-Delivered Nutrition Programs, like Meals on Wheels, are longstanding programs that deliver healthy meals to older adults who cannot go out and purchase food and/or prepare meals in their homes.

This bill would require the state departments listed above and other stakeholders to work together with the Office of Food Insecurity and Affordability to fulfill the mandates of the bill including coordinating outreach for food security programs and doing gaps analyses of underserved areas.

2-1-1 in California

In 2000, the federal government designated the 2-1-1 dialing code to be reserved as a toll-free phone number the public can use to obtain information and referrals to human services resources. In California, the technical operation is overseen by the Public Utilities Commission and state level coordination and leadership is provided by the nonprofit organization the California 2-1-1 Providers Network. The service is primarily operated by county led agencies, commonly the county’s respective United Way, which partner with human service agencies to provide referrals to physical and mental health resources; housing, utility, food, and employment assistance; and suicide and crisis interventions. California 2-1-1 also provides help during federally or state

³ Thorman, T.; Malagon P. California’s Nutrition Safety Net. Public Policy Institute of California. May, 2025. www.ppic.org/publication/californias-nutrition-safety-net

declared emergencies. According to the California 2-1-1 Providers Network, 2-1-1 received 898,309 requests for help in 2025 and 217,168 were for food assistance. This was the third highest need after housing and general personal assistance. The 2-1-1 providers expect an increased demand for food assistance in 2026. ⁴According to the Public Utilities Commission, there are five counties, representing approximately 0.7% of the state's population, that do not have 2-1-1 service. This bill would require the Office to create a 24-hour hotline for food assistance.

Food Banks and Emergency Food Assistance

Food banks are a significant part of California's food security safety net. It is estimated that 10 percent of Californians are supplementing their food costs with free food from an organization that is supplied by a food bank. There are 41 food banks in California that distribute free food to food pantries, community and senior centers that serve hot food, student pantries on college campuses and other organizations that provide free food to those who need it. California food banks receive funding from the United States Department of Agriculture but also have received funding from the state since 2011 through the CalFood program. The CalFood program allocates funding to California's network of food banks to purchase food primarily sourced from California. Originally funding was \$8 million per year but when the COVID- 19 pandemic disrupted the economy, the state significantly increased CalFood funding to an average of \$62.7 million per year. In 2024, the Legislature created the State Emergency Food Bank Reserve Program which requires CDSS to create a food distribution program solely for low-income families after a natural or man-made disaster. This bill would require the Office to establish best practices for food banks and emergency food providers and coordinate communication between these organizations.

New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate

The New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate is located within the Office of the New Jersey Governor and began operating in September 2022. The legislative mandates of the New Jersey office are nearly identical to the ones proposed in this bill. The New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate focuses on four main areas: "supporting state agencies in conducting food security work, supporting the advancement of policy that is aligned with ongoing food security work, collaborating with the philanthropic sector, and supporting and participating in community-driven food security work."⁵ Some of the Office's accomplishments include creating the New Jersey Statewide Food Security Index, working with Rutgers Cooperative Extension to study barriers to signing up for SNAP in New Jersey, and creating a number of outreach materials for individuals and households that are facing food insecurity. This bill would create an office similar to the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate.

Related/Prior Legislation:

SB 444 (Hurtado, 2025) would have declared that the established policy of the state is that every human being has a right to locally grown and raised, affordable, and healthy food. It would have also required specified state agencies to report to the Legislature by January 1, 2027, at a

⁴ www.211california.org/impact-data

⁵ www.nj.gov/foodsecurity/about/office/

minimum, their progress on revising, adopting, or establishing those pertinent policies, regulations, and grant criteria pertinent to distributing sufficient locally grown and raised, affordable and healthy food. SB 444 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Suspense File.

AB 518 (Wicks, Chapter 910, Statutes of 2024) requires CDSS, in consultation with various stakeholders, on or before July 1, 2025, to develop a methodology for estimating the CalFresh participation rate and identifying characteristics of Californians who are eligible for, but not receiving, CalFresh benefits. It also requires targeted outreach to increase enrollment based on that data.

AB 1961 (Wicks, 2024) would have required the Strategic Growth Council, in consultation with specified agencies, to convene the End Hunger in California Master Plan Task Force to develop strategies for ensuring access to healthy and culturally relevant food for all Californians. AB 1961 was vetoed by the Governor.

SB 628 (Hurtado, Chapter 879, Statutes of 2023) declares that it is the established policy of the state that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food and requires relevant agencies to consider that right when making policies.

AB 1967 (Jackson, 2023) would have created the position of Food Insecurity Officer within CDSS. The officer would have been required to promote the benefit adequacy and enrollment rates in the CalFresh and California Food Assistance Program, coordinate efforts to address food insecurity among relevant state agencies, and to consult with relevant state entities and stakeholders with expertise in food insecurity about best practices in carrying out their duties. AB 1967 was held on the Senate Appropriations Suspense File.

COMMENTS

SB 1025 would create the Office of Food Security and Affordability which would coordinate the outreach for California's various food security programs and create collaboration among state departments and stakeholders that run food security programs. It also describes the role of the Director of Food Security and Affordability and creates the Food Security and Affordability Fund to financially support these efforts. Food insecurity is a growing problem in California and across the country. As food prices increase, various strategies and programs will need to be utilized to support those in need. This bill seeks to create an Office of Food Security and Affordability in an effort to coordinate those various strategies and programs to ensure California is maximizing its resources.

POSITIONS

Support:

Community Action Partnership of Kern (Sponsor)
California Retired Teachers Association
County Welfare Directors Association of California
Foodlink for Tulare County
Little Hoover Commission

Oppose:

None received

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