

Date of Hearing: June 16, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

SB 1025 (Hurtado) – As Amended June 8, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 37-0

SUBJECT: Office of Food Security and Affordability

SUMMARY: Establishes the Office of Food Security and Affordability (Office) to develop programs and services that promote food security in California and creates a Food Security and Affordability Fund. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Creates the Office and stipulates that the Office will be an independent public entity not affiliated with another state agency, and cannot be under the supervision, direction, or control of another state agency or their officers.
- 2) Requires the Office to collaborate with appropriate departments to:
 - a) Coordinate statewide outreach for food insecurity programs including developing new initiatives.
 - b) Support application processes for food security grants for in-state providers and state agencies.
 - c) Coordinate communication among food banks and emergency food providers.
 - d) Establish best practices for food banks and emergency food providers.
 - e) Cooperate with research organizations and institutions of higher education to maintain ongoing gap analyses of areas underserved by food assistance programs.
 - f) Work with state and community partners to develop and update a strategic plan based on gap analyses.
 - g) Oversee the development and implementation of public- private partnerships.
 - h) Coordinate outreach about assistance to address food insecurity during federally- or state-declared emergencies.
 - i) Coordinate food insecurity programming for institutions of higher learning in collaboration with the federal Office of Postsecondary Education.
 - j) Develop outreach campaigns to seniors, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations.
 - k) Coordinate outreach efforts to individuals who are newly unemployed and may be eligible for food assistance programs.

- 3) Establishes that the Director of the Office is the administrator and chief executive officer of the Office, requires the Director to be 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.
- 4) Requires the Director to be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the California State Senate, and requires, upon a vacancy of the Director position, a new Director be appointed in the same manner as the original appointment. Allows the Governor to appoint an acting director for no longer than six months.
- 5) Requires the Director 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 the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), the California Department of Education (CDE), and the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA).
 - h) Perform any other functions necessary to carry out the purpose of this title.
- 6) Creates the Food Security and Affordability Fund in the State Treasury for depositing money to implement this bill.
- 7) Requires the Office to use money from this fund, upon appropriation by the Legislature.
- 8) Sunsets this section on January 1, 2037.

EXISTING LAW:

State law:

- 1) Declares that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) § 18700(a)(1))
- 2) 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))
- 3) Requires all relevant state agencies, including but not limited to, CDSS, CDFA, the California Department of Health Care Services, CDE, and CDPH, to consider the right to

affordable and healthy food when creating policies or regulation related to the distribution of affordable food. (WIC § 18700(b))

- 4) Establishes CalFresh as California's implementation of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program. (WIC § 18900)
- 5) Establishes CDSS as the lead agency to partner with CDE to maximize participation in the federal Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children Program (also known as SUNBucks). (WIC § 18901.57)
- 6) 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)
- 7) 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)
- 8) 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))
- 9) Requires CDSS to establish the California Food Assistance Program which provides food assistance to certain noncitizens of the United States (U.S.), 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)
- 10) 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)
- 11) 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)
- 12) Requires CDPH 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)

- 13) 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 school day 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)
- 14) Requires CDE to work with CDSS to maximize participation in the SUNBucks program established by federal law. (ED § 49506)
- 15) Requires CDFA, 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 reservations. (Food and Agricultural Code § 49020)

Federal law:

- 16) Establishes the SNAP program 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 United States Code 2011 et seq.)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, "Unknown General Fund costs, potentially hundreds of thousands annually (until January 1, 2037), to establish the new office and implement the duties."

COMMENTS:

Background: *Food Insecurity in California.* The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines "food insecurity" as the occasional or constant lack of access to the food that one needs in order to live a healthy, active life. It is considered a household-level economic and social condition while hunger is the individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity. While California declared food as a human right in 2023 and produces nearly half of the nation's fruits and vegetables, about 8 million Californians currently struggle with food insecurity, representing 20.3% of the state's population. Factors contributing to food insecurity include economic disparities, high living costs, limited access to affordable nutrition options, and systemic barriers such as racism and discrimination.

Economic factors play a significant role in driving food insecurity, particularly among low-income households. Many Californians struggle to afford basic necessities like housing, healthcare, and transportation, leaving little room in their budgets for nutritious food. High living costs, especially in urban areas like Los Angeles and San Francisco, further exacerbate this challenge, pushing individuals and families into situations where they must choose between paying for rent or putting food on the table.

Limited access to affordable and nutritious food options, commonly referred to as food deserts, is another critical aspect of food insecurity in California. In rural areas, residents may have to travel long distances to reach grocery stores or farmers' markets, while in urban neighborhoods, access to fresh produce and healthy food choices may be scarce. Transportation barriers, inadequate

public transportation, and the prevalence of fast food restaurants and convenience stores offering unhealthy, processed foods compound the lack of access to healthy food. The USDA defines “limited access” as living more than a mile from a large grocery store for urban communities and more than 10 miles for rural areas. In 2016, the California Endowment’s FreshWorks Food Access Report stated that “nearly one million Californians, 45% of whom are low-income, live without access to nearby supermarkets or large grocery stores.”

Moreover, systemic issues such as racism and discrimination disproportionately impact marginalized communities, including Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations, immigrants, and individuals with disabilities, exacerbating their vulnerability to food insecurity. 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

Beyond mere hunger, a lack of adequate food can have long-term physical and mental health consequences, particularly for children. Chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular conditions are more prevalent among food-insecure individuals due to poor nutrition and limited access to healthcare. Children growing up in food-insecure households are at risk of developmental delays, academic struggles, and long-term health consequences, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty and food insecurity.

Food Assistance Programs in California. California's food assistance system is spread across several state departments, with the largest role played by CDSS. There is a wide array of programs with differing eligibility requirements as well as different access points. This can be challenging to coordinate outreach and ensure eligible people are enrolled. The following is a list of major statewide food assistance programs and the state agency responsible for administration:

Program	What it Provides	Responsible Department
CalFresh (SNAP)	Monthly EBT benefits for groceries	CDSS (state supervision; county welfare departments administer locally)
California Food Assistance Program (CFAP)	Food benefits for certain immigrants who do not qualify for federal SNAP	CDSS
Disaster CalFresh	Temporary food assistance during federally approved disasters	CDSS
Restaurant Meals Program	Allows eligible EBT recipients to buy prepared meals at participating restaurants	CDSS with county administration
Emergency Food Assistance Program	Food banks, food pantries, and emergency food distribution	CDSS

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

Commodity Supplemental Food Program	Monthly food packages for low-income seniors	CDSS
Women, Infants, and Children Program	Nutrition benefits, healthy foods, breastfeeding support, and nutrition education	CDPH
School Breakfast Program	Free or reduced-price school breakfasts	CDE
National School Lunch Program	Free or reduced-price school lunches	CDE
Summer Food Service Program	Free summer meals for children	CDE
Seamless Summer Option	Alternative summer meal program for children	CDE
Child and Adult Care Food Program	Meals and snacks in child care centers, family day cares, and adult day care facilities	CDSS
SUN Bucks	Summer grocery benefits for eligible school-age children	Jointly administered by CDSS and CDE
CalFresh Healthy Living	Nutrition education and healthy lifestyle programs	CDPH and CDSS partnership
Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program	Coupons for seniors to buy produce at farmers' markets	CDFA
Farmers' Market Nutrition Program	Produce vouchers for WIC participants	CDPH through WIC

This bill would require the Director of the Office to serve as the liaison with agencies listed in the table above.

Other States. Four other states have an Office or a Council dedicated to statewide food security or food policy. In New Jersey, the Office of the Food Security Advocate is located within the Governor's Office and supported by the state Department of Agriculture. 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.”³

In Nevada, the Office of Food Security is part of the state's Department of Health and Human Services and is responsible for monitoring the Funds for Healthy Nevada Hunger Funds used to support initiatives and programs aimed to reduce hunger throughout Nevada communities and promote public health and improve health services for all Nevadans. In addition, it provides administrative support to the Governor’s Council on Food Security.

In Alaska, the Office of Food Security was created within the Governor's Office in 2022 to coordinate statewide food security and food production efforts. The Office of Food Security has three stated objectives:

³ www.nj.gov/foodsecurity/about/office/

- 1) “Identify resources and set policies to build a strong, sustainable, and healthy food system in the state to ensure food security for all Alaskans;
- 2) “Enhance access to, availability, affordability, and quality of food for all Alaskans; and
- 3) “Identify or expand economic opportunities for the state in food production, food processing, and food distribution businesses.”⁴

In Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Food Policy Council is an Interagency council involving multiple state agencies to improve food security and food systems. The Pennsylvania Food Policy Council was established to:

- 1) “Evaluate issues facing Pennsylvania’s food system including, but not limited to, developing and implementing strategies to improve food security and nutrition, and reduce food waste.
- 2) “Facilitate coordination of interagency efforts designated to reduce hunger and improve nutrition for Pennsylvania residents over their entire lifespan.
- 3) “Facilitate the organization of private and public sector efforts to improve the Commonwealth’s response to challenges in the food system and support food sovereignty.”⁵

Author’s Statement: 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. Far too many eligible seniors, students, people with disabilities, and working families continue to fall through the cracks.

“Food insecurity is more than a moral issue. It is an issue interconnected with public health, education, and economic stability of Californians across that state. Rising food costs and a \$2.6 billion annual food budget shortfall highlight the urgency of a coordinated statewide strategy. [This bill] 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.”

Equity Implications: Hunger and lack of access to healthy foods disproportionately impact vulnerable communities, particularly among low-income individuals, pregnant women, households with children, Black and Latinx populations, immigrants, people who are disabled, and the elderly often face greater food hardship.

⁴ https://gov.alaska.gov/governor-dunleavy-announces-office-of-food-security/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁵ https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pda/about-pda/boards-commissions/pennsylvania-food-policy-council/pennsylvania-food-policy-council-state-agencies?utm_source=chatgpt.com

According to a 2021 analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities of the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, 18 million adults in the U.S. reported that their households didn't have enough to eat sometimes or often in the past week. In California, alarming rates of food insecurity were found among minority communities, with 40% of Black households and 30% of Latinx households reporting food insecurity. Moreover, a study of four tribes across Northern California revealed that a staggering 92% of Native American households suffer from food insecurity.

Creating an office for the purposes of collaborating with state agencies responsible for food assistance programs may reduce barriers to accessing these programs, create efficiencies and help reduce redundancies in outreach and eligibility requirements.

Double referral: Should this bill pass out of this committee, it will be referred to the Assembly Committee on Economic Development, Growth, and Household Impact.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

SB 444 (Hurtado) of 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 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, required 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) of 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 Governor Newsom.*

SB 628 (Hurtado), Chapter 879, Statutes of 2023, declared that it is the established policy of the state that every human being has the right to access sufficient, affordable, and healthy food and required all relevant state agencies to consider this policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations, and grant criteria when those policies, regulations, and criteria are pertinent to the distribution of sufficient affordable food.

AB 1967 (Jackson) of 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.*

Arguments in Support: The Little Hoover Commission writes, “In its 2024 report, *Artificial Intelligence, Food Insecurity, and California’s Vulnerable Populations*, the Commission found that food aid programs in California are dispersed across multiple agencies, programs, and stakeholders, creating challenges for effective coordination and oversight. As a result, the Commission recommended that California establish a Food Security Council to coordinate and oversee the state’s efforts in this area.

“[This bill] would implement the Commission’s recommendation by coordinating statewide food security initiatives, improving outreach to individuals experiencing food insecurity, and supporting the organizations that provide emergency food assistance. For this reason, the Little Hoover Commission supports this bill. If I, the Commission, or our staff can provide any further assistance as this proposal moves through the legislative process, please do not hesitate to ask.”

Arguments in Opposition: None on file.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Community Action Partnership of Kern (Sponsor)
American Academy of Pediatrics, California
Bakersfield College
California Retired Teachers Association
County Welfare Directors Association of California
FoodLink for Tulare County
Kern County Food Policy Council
Little Hoover Commission
Mom's Meals
The Hope Center
University of California
Wasco Recreation and Parks District

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Alexandria Smith / HUM. S. / (916) 319-2089