

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 444 (Hurtado) – As Amended July 3, 2025

Policy Committee: Human Services

Vote: 7 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill revises the existing established policy of the state declaring every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food to, instead, declare every human being has the right to access sufficient locally grown and raised, affordable and healthy food.

In addition, this bill:

- 1) Updates, to reflect the revised declared policy, the existing requirement that all relevant state agencies consider the policy when revising, adopting, or establishing pertinent policies, regulations, and grant criteria. Relevant state agencies include, but are not limited to, the Department of Social Services (CDSS), the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), the State Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), the State Department of Education (CDE), and the State Department of Public Health (CDPH).
- 2) Requires the relevant state agencies to report to the Legislature by January 1, 2027, on their progress on revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations, and grant criteria when pertinent to the distribution of sufficient locally grown and raised, affordable and healthy food.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

- 1) Costs of an unknown amount (GF, federal funds), but likely minor and absorbable, to CDSS, CDFA, DHCS, CDE, CDPH, and various other state agencies to instead consider the right to locally grown and raised food while revising or designing regulations, grant programs or other policies that impact the distribution or availability of food.
- 2) One-time costs (GF, federal funds) of an unknown amount, but likely in the low tens of thousands of dollars statewide, for CDSS, CDFA, DHCS, CDE, and CDPH to compile and submit a report to the Legislature by January 1, 2027. These costs will vary and are potentially absorbable depending on the impact to each agency. The bill is not clear whether this reporting requirement applies to other relevant state agencies and whether the listed agencies are to submit a collective report or individual reports.
- 3) CDSS estimates one-time automation costs of approximately \$137,500 (General Fund (GF), federal funds). These costs include \$86,250 for one-time changes to CalSAWS to create an alert on the CalSAWS screen and to update program rules for CalFresh, and \$51,276 for one-

time changes to the BenefitsCal system to update the CalFresh program rules in the Help Center.

- 4) Potential GF cost pressures of an unknown, but potentially significant amount to the extent changes in department policies, regulations, and criteria related to supporting “locally grown and raised” affordable and healthy food access result in increased costs for food programs.

#### COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

California operates several food assistance programs, including CalFresh, to help residents access food. While these programs have nourished millions, many still fall through the cracks. [This bill] addresses this persistent gap by prioritizing locally sourced foods in state policies—an essential step for strengthening food security and economic resilience. By reducing reliance on external food sources and investing in California farmers, this bill reinforces the state's commitment to a sustainable and self-reliant food system. This legislation is a bold step toward ensuring that all Californians, regardless of income, have access to fresh, local food.

- 2) **Background.** Existing law 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 being able to acquire enough food to meet the needs of an individual or household due to insufficient money or other resources. Data from the United States (U.S.) Census Household Pulse Survey shows that in September 2024, 22% of California households were food insecure and 27% of households with children were food insecure, with disparities for Black and Latino households at 43% and 33% respectively.

California, with the aid of the federal government, provides several programs to address food insecurity, including CalFresh, administered by CDSS, the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program, administered by CDE, the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, administered by CDPH, and several nutrition programs that provide meals for older adults, administered by CDA.

Existing law declares it is the established policy of the state that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food. Existing law requires all relevant state agencies to consider this state policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations, and grant criteria when pertinent to the distribution of sufficient affordable food.

This bill revises this policy to, instead, declare every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food that is locally grown and raised, and requires state agencies to consider this new state policy when adopting relevant policies, regulations, and criteria.

According to California Farm Bureau, sponsor of the bill:

The state has recognized the right to affordable and healthy food but has yet to emphasize the importance of locally grown and raised food.

Clarifying the state's commitment to food access through policies that promote locally sourced food is vital in dismantling food insecurity in California. Encouraging local food production and distribution benefits both food insecure communities and California's agricultural economy.

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