

SENATE THIRD READING

SB 515 (Richardson)

As Amended April 7, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires cities and counties, when collecting demographic data on the ancestry and ethnic origins of newly hired employees, to include additional categories for African Americans relating to their status as descents of enslaved persons.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires, on or after January 1, 2027, a city, including a charter city, county, or city and county, when collecting demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of persons hired for employment by a city, county, or city and county, to include additional collection categories and tabulations for Black or African American groups, including, but not limited to, all of the following:
 - a) African Americans who are descendants of persons who were enslaved in the United States;
 - b) Blacks who are not descendants of persons who were enslaved in the United States, including, but not limited to, African Blacks, Caribbean Blacks, and other Blacks; and,
 - c) Unknown or choose not to identify.
- 2) Finds and declares that enhancing accuracy, comprehensiveness, and consistency of demographic data concerning employees who are descendants of persons enslaved and emancipated in the United States is a matter of statewide concern and is not a municipal affair as that term is used in Section 5 of Article XI of the California Constitution. Therefore, Section 1 of this bill adding Section 53060.8 to the Government Code applies to all cities, including charter cities.
- 3) Provides that if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code.
- 4) Makes related findings and declarations.

COMMENTS

- 1) *Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals.* In 2020, the Legislature enacted AB 3121 (Weber, 2020) which created the Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, with a Special Consideration for African Americans Who are Descendants of Persons Enslaved in the United States (Task Force). The Task Force was given the following duties:

- a) Identify, compile, and synthesize the relevant corpus of evidentiary documentation of the institution of slavery that existed within the United States and the colonies that became the United States from 1619 to 1865, inclusive;
 - b) Recommend appropriate ways to educate the California public of the Task Force's findings;
 - c) Recommend appropriate remedies in consideration of the Task Force's findings; and,
 - d) Submit a written report of its findings and recommendations to the Legislature.
- 2) *The California Reparations Report*. The Task Force released its final report in June 2023. The report recommends remedies, including compensation, for African Americans as repayment for the State's human rights violations against African Americans and their descendants. The report describes:
- "In developing the recommendations regarding methodologies for calculating reparations, the Task Force considered, among numerous other factors, harms to African Americans (especially descendants of persons enslaved in the United States) attributable to the State of California and its local jurisdictions, and the availability of data. In many instances of atrocities, California has not collected data that would allow for precise calculations, and for those areas, the Task Force recommends, as AB 3121 directs, how the Legislature should calculate reparations in drafting and implementing a future state-level reparations scheme.
- "The Task Force voted to recommend that only those individuals who are able to demonstrate that they are the descendant of either an enslaved African American in the United States, or a free African American living in the United States prior to 1900, be eligible for monetary reparations. The Task Force also determined that the State of California, potentially through the recommended new California American Freedman's Affairs Agency, should take responsibility for assisting any requester in establishing whether they qualify, by funding or otherwise handling the tracing and confirmation of this lineage through whatever means necessary. While the data available to the Task Force and its experts did not separate out descendant status from other racial or ethnic data, the Task Force generally recommends that the Legislature begin to collect data regarding descendant status and, when calculating reparations as recommended by the Task Force, take this data into account in formulating the most accurate amount of needed reparations as possible."
- 3) *SB 189 of 2022*. To partially address the Task Force recommendation that data regarding descent status be collected, the Legislature passed SB 189 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 48, Statutes of 2022. SB 189 required the State Controller's Office and the Department of Human Resources, when collecting demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of persons hired into state employment, to include additional collection categories for Black or African Americans regarding their status as descendants of persons who were enslaved in the United States. Those categories, defined in SB 189, include: African Americans who are descendants of persons who were enslaved in the United States, African Blacks, American Freedman, Caribbean Blacks, and other Blacks.
- 4) *Bill Summary*. This bill requires cities and counties, starting January 1, 2027, to include additional collection categories and tabulations for Black or African American groups when collecting demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of persons hired into city or

county employment, using the same categories as the State Controller's Office and the Department of Human Resources.

According to the Author

According to the author, "Senate Bill 515 advances California's commitment to equity and inclusion by improving how local governments collect demographic data on Black or African American communities. Too often, these groups are lumped into a single category, which masks the unique experiences and challenges of subgroups such as African Americans, Afro-Caribbean's, and African immigrants.

"This bill ensures that local agencies align with the data standards already used by state departments, promoting consistency, accuracy, and fairness. By capturing more complete demographic information, SB 515 empowers local governments to develop better-informed policies and programs that serve all communities more effectively."

Arguments in Support

The Coalition for a Just and Equitable California, sponsor of this bill, states, "The inclusion of additional demographic categories across all California cities and counties, particularly a category of data collection for descendants of persons enslaved and emancipated from U.S. Chattel Slavery, will provide a clearer understanding of the specific needs and challenges faced by this community of over two million California residents. As the saying goes, you can't serve a community if you don't see a community. The policy proposed in SB 515 will bring much-needed attention and finally enable much-needed support for a population of residents who have, until now, been completely invisible to state policymakers. By requiring cities and counties to collect this data beginning in 2027, SB 515 builds on existing changes to how our state collects data on this important community, particularly changes created by the passage of section 14 of SB 189 (2022), and ensures that local decision-makers have access to the same accurate and detailed information that state decision-makers have now, leading to targeted support and meaningful change.

"Furthermore, the bill rightly emphasizes the protection of individual privacy and the secure handling of sensitive demographic data in accordance with existing laws and regulations. This provision will help to build public trust and encourage participation in data collection efforts, ultimately improving the reliability and utility of the information gathered.

"SB 515 acknowledges the unique history and identity of the descendants of the Americans who built this country, while advancing the broader goal of social and economic justice. By recognizing the distinct experiences of this community, this bill takes a vital step toward addressing longstanding disparities and ensuring that public resources are allocated fairly and effectively."

Arguments in Opposition

The Carlsbad Citizens for Community Oversight states, "I am writing to express our opposition to SB 515 Local government: collection of demographic data which would require the collection of lineage data from employees.

"Carlsbad Citizens for Community Oversight urges you to vote NO on SB 515."

FISCAL COMMENTS

One-time costs of an unknown, but potentially significant amount to 58 counties and 478 cities, likely exceeding \$150,000 in the aggregate, to comply with the requirements of this bill. Specifically, cities and counties will likely incur one-time costs to update forms and data management systems to include the more detailed categories required by this bill. Some smaller municipalities may incur minimal costs, but large municipalities that employ tens of thousands of people may incur significant costs to comply with this measure. Ongoing local costs are likely to be relatively minor. Local costs are likely reimbursable by the state (General Fund), subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

VOTES**SENATE FLOOR: 28-10-2**

YES: Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Hurtado, Laird, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Umberg, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

NO: Alvarado-Gil, Choi, Dahle, Grove, Jones, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Seyarto, Strickland, Valladares

ABS, ABST OR NV: Limón, Reyes

ASM LOCAL GOVERNMENT: 8-0-2

YES: Carrillo, Pacheco, Ramos, Ransom, Blanca Rubio, Stefani, Ward, Wilson

ABS, ABST OR NV: Ta, Hoover

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-3-1

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Ahrens, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

NO: Sanchez, Dixon, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Ta

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