Office of Senate Floor Analyses
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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 518
Author: Weber Pierson (D), et al.
Amended: 9/5/25
Vote: 21

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: 11-2, 4/22/25
AYES: Umberg, Allen, Arreguín, Ashby, Caballero, Durazo, Laird, Stern, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NOES: Niello, Valladares

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 5-1, 5/23/25
AYES: Caballero, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NOES: Seyarto
NO VOTE RECORDED: Dahle

SENATE FLOOR: 28-10, 6/2/25
AYES: Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Umberg, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NOES: Alvarado-Gil, Choi, Dahle, Grove, Jones, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Seyarto, Strickland, Valladares
NO VOTE RECORDED: Hurtado, Reyes

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 60-17, 9/9/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Descendants of enslaved persons: reparations

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill, contingent upon appropriation of sufficient funding by the Legislature, establishes the Bureau for Descendants of American Slavery (Bureau) within state government, and establishes the Bureau's duties relating to determining an individual's status as a descendant.

Assembly Amendments move the Bureau from the Department of Justice to the Civil Rights Department (CRD); remove the provisions establishing a Property Reclamation Division within the Bureau and the provisions for providing compensation to victims of racially motivated eminent domain; modify the definition of "descendant"; require the Bureau's Genealogy Division to adopt establish a process for certification of descendants consistent with the process adopted through SB 437 (Weber Pierson, 2025); and add provisions for the protection of nonpublic personal and genetic information held under the Bureau's authority.

ANALYSIS:

Existing constitutional law:

1) Provides for equal protection under the law. (United States Constitution (U.S. Const.), 14th Amend., § 1; California Constitution (Cal. Const.), art. I, § 7.)

2) Provides that all persons are by nature free and independent and have inalienable rights, including acquiring, possessing, and protecting property. (Cal. Const., art. I, § 1.)

3) Provides that the State shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting. (Cal. Const., art. I, § 31.)

State law establishes the Task Force to Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans, with Special Consideration for African Americans who are Descended from Persons Enslaved in the United States (Task Force), and provided that the Task Force statutes would remain in effect until July 1, 2023, and as of that date be repealed. (Government Code (Gov. Code), §§ 8301-8301.7, repealed by Gov. Code § 8301.7.)

This bill:

1) States the following Legislative intent:

   a) It is the intent of the Legislature in establishing the Bureau to establish an initial framework, and that the scope and responsibilities of the Bureau may expand as necessary to fulfill its mission and address additional harms as identified.

b) It is the intent of the Legislature that, as the Bureau expands its scope in the future, it shall do both of the following: (1) address the lasting harms of disenfranchisement, segregation, discrimination, exclusion, neglect, and violence impacting both descendants and communities harmed as described in the Task Force's report, and (2) advise on reparative remedies to target the persistent consequences of that legacy, as described in the Task Force's report.

c) Implementation of this bill shall be contingent upon appropriation of sufficient funding by the Legislature in the annual Budget Act or other statute for that purpose.

2) Defines the following terms:

a) "Bureau" means the Bureau for Descendants of American Slavery.

b) "Deputy director" means the Deputy Director of the Bureau.

c) "Descendants" means individuals who can establish direct lineage to a person who, prior to 1900, was subjected to American chattel slavery and meets at least one of the following criteria:

i. Was emancipated through legal or extralegal means, including self-purchase, manumission, executive or legislative action, military service, or judicial ruling.

ii. Obtained freedom through gradual abolition statutes or constitutional amendments.

iii. Was classified as a fugitive from bondage under federal or state law.

iv. Was deemed contraband by military authorities.

v. Rendered military or civic service while subject to legal restrictions based on ancestry historically associated with slavery.

3) Establishes the Bureau in within the CRD; the Bureau shall be under the direct control of a deputy director who is responsible to the Director of Civil Rights.

4) Provides that the deputy director of the Bureau shall be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate, and shall perform all duties, exercise all powers, assume and discharge all responsibilities, and carry out and effect all purposes vested by law in the Bureau.

5) Requires the Bureau to establish a mission statement consistent with the recommendations from the former Task Force.

6) Requires the Bureau to verify an individual's status as a descendant, proof of which shall be a qualifying criterion for benefits authorized by the state for descendants.

7) Requires the Bureau to create a Genealogy Division; following the establishment of a process for conducting or verifying genelogical research for the purpose of confirming an individual's status as a descendant as provided in SB 437 (Weber Pierson, 2025), the Genealogy Division shall do all of the following:

   a) Establish a process for individuals to request certification informed by the process created pursuant to SB 437 (Weber Pierson, 2025).

   b) Review and determine requests for certification as a descendant.

   c) Establish a process for individuals to appeal a determination made pursuant to the certification process.

8) Provides that the certification process described in 7) shall become operative only if SB 437 (Weber Pierson, 2025) takes effect on or before January 1, 2026.

9) Requires the Bureau to create an Education and Outreach Division to develop and implement a public education campaign regarding all of the following:

   a) The cycle of gentrification, displacement, and exclusion.

   b) The connection between redlining and gentrification.

   c) The history of discriminatory urban planning in California.

   d) Other findings presented in the California Reparations Report.

10) Permits the Education and Outreach Division, to accomplish the goals in 9), to collaborate with colleges and universities, community organizations, and individuals, including organizations supported with funds specified in Item 6610-001-0001 of the Budget Act of 2025.

11) Requires the Bureau to create a Legal Affairs Division to do all of the following:

   a) Provide legal advice, counsel, and services to the Bureau and its officials.

b) Ensure that the Bureau's programs are administered in accordance with applicable legislative authority.

c) Advise the head of the Bureau on legislative legal, regulatory initiatives.

d) Serve as an external liaison on legal matters with other state agencies and other entities.

12) Provides that nonpublic personal and genetic information held under the Bureau's authority shall be collected, held, and disclosed only as relevant and necessary to accomplish the purposes set forth in this bill and in a manner permitted by and consistent with federal and California data privacy laws.

13) Requires the Bureau, before asking individuals to supply information for its system of records, to inform each individual all of the following:

a) The authority that authorizes the solicitation of the information and whether disclosure of that information is voluntary or mandatory.

b) The principal purpose or purposes for which the information is intended to be used.

c) The routine uses that may be made of the information.

d) The effects on the individual, if any, of not providing all or any part of the requested information.

14) Prohibits the Bureau from disclosing any data contained in its system of records by any means of communication to any person except as necessary to fulfill the purposes of this bill and pursuant to either a written request by, or the written consent of, the individual to whom the record pertains; intra-agency, interagency, or public disclosure shall not be permitted without that written authorization.

15) Permits the Bureau to receive moneys from any federal, state, or local grant and from any nongovernmental entity, including from any private donation or grant, for the purposes of this bill.

16) Contains a severability clause.

Comments

In 2020, the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed, SB 3121 (Weber, Ch. 319, Stats. 2020), which established the first-in-the nation 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) to study and develop reparations proposals for California's role in accommodating and facilitating slavery, perpetuating the vestiges of enslavement, enforcing state-sanctioned discrimination, and permitting pervasive, systematic structures of discrimination against African Americans. The Task Force completed its work and issued its final report in 2023. The report contains a number of recommended remedies the state could implement in order to atone for its decades of state-sanctioned white supremacy.

This bill is intended to implement two of the Task Force's recommendations, by establishing the Bureau for Descendants of American Slavery to oversee reparations programs, including by establishing a method for determining how a person can establish their status as a descendant eligible for reparations. Amendments taken in the Assembly clarify how the Bureau will adopt recommendations for establishing descendant status developed pursuant to SB 437 (Weber Pierson, 2025) and provide privacy protections for personal and genetic information provided to the Bureau. The bill's implementation is contingent upon the Legislature's appropriation of sufficient funding for the bill's purpose.

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

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, the fiscal effect is as follows:

1) Costs (General Fund, Legal Services Revolving Fund) to DOJ to establish and operate the Bureau, likely in the tens of millions of dollars annually at a minimum. DOJ provided this committee with a cost estimate for the May 23, 2025, version of this bill, which was substantively similar to the current version but did not contain the personal information provisions referenced in item 8, above. DOJ anticipated costs of approximately $11.3 million in fiscal year (FY) 2025-26, $20 million in FY 2026-29, and $18 million ongoing thereafter. These costs are largely for staffing; the department estimates it will need about 85 new staff positions spread across DOJ's existing legal, information services, and research divisions to handle the workload required of the Bureau. DOJ's estimate also includes substantial resources to establish an IT infrastructure for the Bureau. The department notes it requires delayed implementation until January 1, 2027, to accommodate hiring of legal staff and until January 1, 2030, to create IT systems.

   This is likely a conservative estimate; actual costs to operate the Bureau may be higher, especially if additional reparative proposals for descendants of enslaved

people are implemented in the future. As noted below, several such proposals are pending in the Legislature this session.

2) Costs (General Fund, special funds) of an unknown but likely significant amount to state entities to compensate dispossessed owners. Actual costs will depend on the number of claims substantiated by the Bureau; state workload associated with evaluating claims, providing information to the Bureau as required, and litigating claims; and the value of real property or monetary compensation ultimately awarded. In the aggregate, these costs may be in the tens of millions to hundreds of millions of dollars.

The following state entities reported costs as of the date this analysis was prepared:

- Department of Water Resources (DWR) anticipates costs above $5 million to search records upon request by potential dispossessed owners of property. DWR also notes the Department of General Services would charge the department approximately $12,000 per transaction in the event property is required to be returned to a dispossessed owner.

- State Parks anticipates costs around $2.5 million (General Fund) for 12 full time positions, including an archivist, analysts, attorneys, legal secretary, agents, and state historian. State Parks reports the state park system is comprised of over 1.6 million acres of land and began during an era of systemic discrimination; the department will need significant resources for staff with "expertise in history, archives, research, property, and law to locate, authenticate, and contextualize relevant historical documentation to ensure an objective evaluation" of property that may be subject to claims authorized by this bill. State Parks anticipates costs possibly in the tens of millions to hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation resulting from such claims.

3) Costs (local funds, General Fund) of an unknown but likely significant amount to local government entities for workload associated with evaluating claims, providing information to the Bureau as required, and litigating claims alleging racially motivated eminent domain. Local entities will also likely incur significant costs providing compensation to dispossessed owners. Local costs incurred to provide information to the Bureau may be reimbursed from the General Fund if the Commission on State Mandates determines those duties constitute a reimbursable state mandate. It is not clear whether the other local costs resulting from this bill may be reimbursable.

4) Costs (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund) of an unknown but potentially significant amount to the courts to adjudicate claims for compensation based on racially motivated eminent domain that are rejected by government entities. Actual costs to the courts will depend on the number of cases filed and the amount of time needed to adjudicate each case. It generally costs approximately $1,000 to operate a courtroom for one hour. Although courts are not funded on the basis of workload, increased pressure on the Trial Court Trust Fund may create a demand for increased funding for courts from the General Fund. The fiscal year 2025-26 state budget provides $82 million ongoing General Fund to the Trial Court Trust Fund for court operations.

SUPPORT: (Verified 9/9/25)

ACLU California Action
AdvancED Consulting, LLC
All Home
Alliance for Reparations, Reconciliation and Truth
Alliance San Diego
Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders for Civic Empowerment
Asian Law Alliance
BAPAC San Diego Chapter
Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative
Black Californians United for Early Care and Education
Black Equity Collective
Black Leadership Alliance Coalition
Black Women for Wellness Action Project
Black Women Organized for Political Action
Board of Supervisors for the City and County of San Francisco
Buena Vista Community Institute
Buena Vista United Methodist Church
California Black Housing Advisory Taskforce
California Black Power Network
California Faculty Association
Catalyst California
Center Against Racism & Trauma
CFT – A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO
Coalition for Justice and Accountability
Community Housing Development Corporation
Courage California
Don Tamaki, former Task Force Member
Dr. Cheryl Grills, former Task Force Member

Epworth Methodist Church Berkeley
Equal Justice Society
Equality California
Faith in the Valley
First Constitutional Church of Santa Barbara
Greater Los Angeles African American Chamber of Commerce
Greater Sacramento Urban League
Impact Fund
Imperial Valley Equity & Justice
Japanese American Citizens League, Berkeley Chapter
Japanese American Citizens League, Eden Township Chapter
Japanese American Citizens League, Florin-Sacramento Valley Chapter
Japanese American Citizens League, San Jose Chapter
Lisa Holder, former Task Force Member
Live Free California
Multi-faith ACTION Coalition
NAACP California-Hawai'i Conference
North San Diego County Promise
Prevention Institute
Public Advocates
San Diego for Every Child
San Francisco Public Defender's Office
Sarah Webster Fabio Center for Social Justice
Secure Justice
St. Columba Catholic Church
Western Center on law and Poverty
Where Is My Land
5 individuals

OPPOSITION: (Verified 9/9/25)

American Civil Rights Project
American Redress Coalition of California Bay Area
American Redress Coalition of California Sacramento
California Black Lineage Society
California Organizations for Reparations
Californians for Equal Rights Foundation
Coalition For A Just And Equitable California
Emend the Mass Media Group
Hyde Park Organizational Partnership for Empowerment
Lineage Equity and Advancement Project

New Frontier Democratic Club
Pacific Legal Foundation
San Francisco Bay Area Black & Jewish Unity Coalition
5 individuals

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: According to the Equal Justice Society:

> The Equal Justice Society (EJS) supports Senate Bill 518 (Weber-Pierson), which would establish the Bureau for Descendants of American Slavery and require the bureau, as part of its duties, to determine how an individual's status as a descendant would be confirmed. This bill is directly in line with the final recommendations put forth by the California Reparations Task Force, which called for measures that provide practical and meaningful steps to repair the damage caused by centuries of discrimination and systemic injustice…
>
> We believe that reparations for descendants and the larger African American community as a group, should be impactful, transformative, long-lasting, and comprehensive in accordance with the United Nations' (UN) five principles for reparations.
>
> SB 518 is one of many crucial steps toward addressing the long-lasting and ongoing harms inflicted upon Descendants of U.S. Chattel Slavery and the larger African American community as a group.

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: According to the Lineage Equity and Advancement Project:

> Firstly, SB 518 will significantly delay the implementation of policies intended to benefit descendants of enslaved persons. As written, the Bureau cannot begin its work until the completion of genealogy research mandated by SB 437 (Weber Pierson), a separate bill that directs millions of dollars toward unnecessary genealogical research, with no start date and no end date to the research. This indefinite timeline creates an open-ended delay, preventing any meaningful process in establishing eligibility criteria for administering benefits…
>
> Additionally, SB 518 was drafted without meaningful input from grassroots California-based organizations and leaders who have long been engaged in advocating for Reparations and Reparative justice. Effective policy development requires the inclusion of voices from the communities directly impacted by historical injustices. By failing to incorporate the perspectives of these stakeholders in the legislative process, the bill risks implementing top-

down solutions that do not fully address the needs, priorities, or concerns of the people it aims to serve, thereby perpetuating one of the harms that California's Reparations Task Force cited as grounds for Reparative action: namely, political disenfranchisement.

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 60-17, 9/9/25
AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Valencia, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas
NOES: Castillo, Chen, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Hoover, Johnson, Macedo, Patterson, Sanchez, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis
NO VOTE RECORDED: Alanis, Flora, Lackey

Prepared by: Allison Whitt / JUD. / (916) 651-4113
10/19/26 10:39:26

****** END ******