

Date of Hearing: April 2, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

AB 2150 (Arambula) – As Introduced February 6, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Public social services: higher education

**SUMMARY:** Requires county human services agencies to include basic needs directors or coordinators while developing engagement protocols with public higher education institutions; requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to develop and facilitate a training for basic needs directors or coordinators, and convene a workgroup. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Specifies that a county human services agency must include basic needs directors, basic needs coordinators, or designated staff from each campus of a public institution of higher education when developing protocols for engagement between the agency and a campus of an institution of public higher education located within the county.
- 2) Adds regionally relevant stakeholders to the list of stakeholders that a county human services agency and public institution are encouraged to consult with while developing the protocol.
- 3) Requires CDSS to:
  - a) In consultation with staff liaisons and basic needs directors, basic needs coordinators, or other designated professional staff from institutions of public higher education within the county, develop a training to be available for basic needs directors, staff of a campus basic needs center, other designated professional staff from each campus of an institution of higher education, and eligibility workers. The training must include at least the following topics:
    - i) Student income and how sources of student income can be evaluated for eligibility;
    - ii) Work requirements and how certain classes may defer working requirements for CalWORKs participants; and,
    - iii) The assessment and approval process of campus-based local programs that increase employability.
  - b) Facilitate the training developed as described above to ensure the sustained education and skills development needed for the success of county social services, colleges, universities, and students.
  - c) Convene a workgroup that meets quarterly, comprising all of the following:
    - i) All 58 county staff liaisons;
    - ii) At least four college campus basic needs directors or other designed campus staff from multiple regions and campuses; and,
    - iii) At least one staff member from each higher education segment, including, but not limited to:

1. The office of the Chancellor of the California State University (CSU);
  2. The office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges (CCCs);
  3. The office of the President of the University of California (UC) if a representative is provided. The office of the President of the UC is requested to provide a representative for purposes of this workgroup;
  4. The Center for Healthy Communities at California State University, Chico; and,
  5. Relevant stakeholders as needed to share best practices, updates, challenges, or other topics related to programs and services offered by the department that may be available to students attending the campus of an institution of public higher education.
- d) In collaboration with the workgroup convened as described above do both of the following:
- i) Discuss enrollment trends in public social services programs, including, but not limited to, CalFresh, the CalWORKs program, the Medi-Cal program, and State Disability Insurance; and
  - ii) Identify barriers to enrollment and action to resolve those barriers.
- 4) Publish technical assistance provided in response to any requests submitted by county liaisons.
  - 5) On or before June 30, 2026, and every three years thereafter, in collaboration with stakeholders, submit a report to the Legislature with findings and recommendations relating to enrollment success trends and services offered by CDSS that may be available to students attending a campus of an institution of public higher education.
  - 6) Clarifies “basic needs coordinator” has the same meaning as defined in Education Code § 66023.5.

**EXISTING LAW:**

State law:

- 1) Requires CDSS to maintain and regularly update the list of programs identified by a workgroup which includes representatives of the office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, offices of the Chancellor of the California State University, University of California Chancellors’ offices, the California Workforce Investment Board, county human services agencies, and advocates for students and client as meeting specified federal standards, which provide that a student qualifies for an exemption from the CalFresh program’s eligibility rules if the student’s attendance can be described as part of a program to increase the student’s employability. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 18901.11(b))

- 2) Instructs CDSS to issue and maintain instructions for county human services agencies that maximize CalFresh eligibility and minimize the burden for applicants and recipients to verify exemptions to the CalFresh student eligibility rules for students. (WIC § 18901.11(c))
- 3) Defines “basic needs services and resources” as housing, food, clothing, feminine hygiene, diapers, technology, childcare, and mental health services and resources. (Education Code [EDC] § 66023.5(a))
- 4) Establishes a “basic needs coordinator” as a broker in identifying, supporting, and linking students to on- and off-campus housing, food, mental health, and other basic needs services and resources. (EDC § 66023.5(b))
- 5) Establishes the Community College Student Financial Aid Outreach Program to provide financial aid training to counselors, which includes addressing the financial needs of a number of in-need populations of students, as specified. (EDC § 69514.5)
- 6) Establishes the CalWORKs Recipients Education Program within the (CCCs) and specifies the intention of the program is to assist CalWORKs recipients prepare for employment. (EDC § 79200 et seq.)

Federal law:

- 7) 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. (United States Code [USC], Title 7, § 2011 et seq.)
- 8) Restricts students who are enrolled at least half-time in institutions of higher education from qualifying for SNAP benefits, unless the individual qualifies for an exception, as specified. (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 7 § 273.5 et seq.)
- 9) Establishes under federal law the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to provide aid and welfare-to-work services to eligible families. (42 USC § 601 et seq.)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown, this bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

**COMMENTS:**

**Background:** *Students in Poverty Accessing Services.* Students experience unique needs while enrolled in a higher education institution due to the high cost of education in addition to living expenses. In addition to unique needs, complicated program rules appear to create barriers to student access to some of the state’s largest anti-poverty programs, such as CalWORKs, CalFresh, and Medi-Cal. In recent years, the Legislature has taken proactive steps to address the prevalence of student hunger and housing insecurity.

The number of students living in poverty has progressively worsened over the last few years which might be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. The California Student Aid Commission (Commission) reports that the COVID-19 pandemic made it more difficult for students to find housing and meet food needs. Using the Student Expenses and Resources Survey (SEARS), the

Commission reports that there is a 13% increase in students reporting food insecurity and a 17% increase in housing insecurity.

In February 2022, a CalFresh workgroup convened to understand how students the benefits system and process, as well as identify recommendations to help promote student participation in the CalFresh program by the Commission published a report of their findings. The workgroup found a lack of awareness and navigation support, the administrative burden of the application process itself, and having to repeatedly provide documentation or attend appointments at inconvenient times were all barriers to most students who are also balancing school and jobs. The workgroup also reported that, “Among California’s postsecondary students, it is estimated that between 400,000 and 750,000 are eligible for CalFresh. Yet only 127,000 students receive food benefits through CalFresh.” This bill aims to provide more support to close the gap between those who qualify and those who are receiving benefits.

*County Liaisons for Higher Education.* In 2022, AB 1326 (Chapter 570, Statutes of 2021) created county human services agency staff liaisons to serve as a point of contact for any institution of public higher education located within the county in order to provide information on county programs and services offered that may be available to students. County human services agencies were also required to develop protocols for engagement between the staff liaison and public higher education institutions.

Six months after AB 1326 took effect, CDSS released All County Information Notice No. I-22-48 instructing counties on their responsibility to develop protocols for engagement between the county and a campus. The notice also requested counties provide information to CDSS specifying the designated staff liaison. Furthermore, the all-counties information notice also informed counties of the survey due on or before January 1, 2025, and specified that, “the survey must address the following:

- The barriers and opportunities faced by county staff liaisons in responding to the requests of counselors or other relevant professional staff.
- The barriers and opportunities faced by counselors or other relevant professional staff in engaging with county staff liaisons.
- The barriers and opportunities for increased collaboration between student assistance programs enabling cross referrals between different programs, including CalFresh, food pantries, and homeless student assistance.
- Any changes in counselors’ or other relevant professional staffs’ knowledge or awareness of county programs as a result of the county liaison position.
- The experiences of students connected to county services through counselors or other relevant professional staff.
- An estimated number of college students at each institution of public higher education likely eligible for, but not receiving, public assistance program benefits, including CalFresh, CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal.
- An estimated number of college students at each institution of public higher education that enrolled in public assistance programs, including, but not limited to, CalFresh,

CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal, as a result of the engagement with the county liaison position.”

On January 12, 2023, CDSS issued a subsequent All County Information Notice I-85-22 to provide counties with considerations for developing protocols for engagement as a result of the workgroup CDSS facilitated in compliance with AB 1326. The considerations for developing protocols for engagement include: maintaining relationships, defining roles and responsibilities, communication, and resources available to the counties. The county letter specifies that these are suggestions and requirements for developing protocols of engagement.

*Basic Needs Coordinator.* CCCs are required to have a basic needs center with a coordinator to assist students with housing, food, clothing, feminine hygiene, diapers, technology, childcare, and mental health services and other resources. Basic needs centers, located on college campuses, are also required to inform students about government programs such as CalFresh, the California Earned Income Tax Credit, the Young Child Tax Credit, and the California Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children. As such, basic needs coordinators likely have a unique understanding of the student population and experience assisting with applications for programs. There is no current requirement for CSU or UC campuses to have the equivalent.

**Author’s Statement:** According to the Author, “Many college students move hundreds of miles away from home, experience limited family support, and encounter financial complications tied to their scholarship or work requirements. Because these unique circumstances make navigating the complex eligibility requirements of public assistance programs particularly challenging, I authored AB 1326 in 2021 to create a county liaison of higher education to help students navigate these challenges.

Since implementing AB 1326, there has been a lack of coordination across the state. To ensure that all students receive support, regardless of where they attend university, AB 2150 establishes a statewide network of basic needs coordinators and county liaisons of higher education to share best practices.”

**Equity Implications:** In 2019, SEARS identified racial disparities among students who identified as homeless, with 38% of respondents identifying as both Hispanic or Latino and homeless and 23% identifying as Black or African American and homeless.

In 2019, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice Survey collaborated with the CCCs to publish a survey of CCC students’ basic needs. Of those surveyed, 50% of CCC students experienced food insecurity within the past 30 days, and 60% experienced housing insecurity in the previous year, with 19% of respondents reporting they experienced homelessness in the previous year. The percentage of food insecurity rises to 60% when students identify as African American, American Indian, or Alaskan Native.

In 2018, the CSU surveyed its student population and found that 41.5% of CSU students identified as food insecure, and 10.9% of CSU students identified as having experienced homelessness one or more times in the previous year. CSU students who identify as Black and the first in their families to attend college, experience food insecurity at a higher rate than their peers, as the survey found more than 65% identified as food insecure and 18% identified as homeless.

Connecting students to services is crucial to ensuring they can continue to finish programs that lead to stable jobs. Students of color disproportionately experience difficulties meeting everyday basic needs. Programs that are tailored to making linkages to public assistance programs will likely positively impact these students.

**Double referral:** This bill will be referred to the Assembly Higher Education Committee should it pass out of this committee.

#### **RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:**

**AB 870 (Arambula) of 2023**, would have required CDSS to convene a workgroup to share best practices, updates, challenges, or other topics related to programs and services offered by CDSS that may be available to students attending a public higher education institution. *AB 870 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

**AB 1326 (Arambula), Chapter 570, Statutes of 2021**, required a county human services agency to designate at least one employee as a staff liaison to serve as a contact for academic counselors and other professional staff at a campus of an institution of public higher education within the county to provide information on available public social services; required the agency to develop protocols for engagement between the staff liaison and a campus of an institution of public higher education

**AB 775 (Berman) Chapter 942, Statutes of 2021**, would have required CCCs, no later than July 1, 2022, to establish the position of Basic Needs Coordinator to identify, support, and link students with campus housing, food, mental health, and other basic needs. *AB 775 was amended to become a bill pertaining to elections.*

**AB 85 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 4, Statutes of 2021)** appropriated \$28.8 8 million for county administrators and outreach costs associated with CalFresh benefits to students enrolled in higher education institutions

**SB 174 (Dodd), Chapter 173, Statutes of 2019**, requires CDSS by January 1, 2021 to create a standardized form to be used by higher education institutions for the purposes of verifying a student's participation in either a federal or state work-study program for the purpose of determining CalFresh eligibility.

**AB 1278 (Gabriel), Chapter 517, Statutes of 2019**, required each CCC and CSU campus and requests each UC campus to provide on a website-based account for an enrolled student notification of and a link to internet sites of CalFresh and local mental health and housing resources.

**AB 2933 (Medina) of 2018**, would have required county health and human service agencies to designate an agency liaison for higher education and encouraged agencies to consult with community colleges, as specified. *AB 2933 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

**SB 85 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 23, Statutes of 2017**, requires the Trustees of the CSU, authorizes the governing board of participating a CCC district, and encourages the Regents of the UC to designate, a "hunger free campus" if they meet specified criteria, as defined, for the purpose of procuring additional legislative funds.

*AB 214 (Weber), Chapter 134, Statutes of 2017*, required the California Student Aid Commission to notify Cal Grant recipients who qualify for participation in the CalFresh program. Provided clarity to existing policies in order to simplify CalFresh administration for college students and required CDSS to maintain a list of programs that provide a student potential eligibility for a CalFresh exemption if specific requirements are met.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

California Association of Food Banks (Sponsor)  
California Competes: Higher Education for A Strong Economy  
California State University, Office of The Chancellor  
Community Action Partnership of Orange County  
Faculty Association of California Community Colleges  
Food for People, the Food Bank for Humboldt County  
Food in Need of Distribution Food Bank  
Food Share  
Genup (generation Up)  
Glide  
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank  
San Diego Food Bank  
San Jose-evergreen Community College District  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz County  
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley  
Western Center on Law & Poverty  
Westside Food Bank

**Opposition**

County Welfare Directors Association of California

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