

Date of Hearing: March 11, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES  
Alex Lee, Chair  
AB 79 (Arambula) – As Amended March 4, 2024

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

**SUMMARY:** Requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to develop a training for basic needs directors and staff, convene a workgroup, and submit a report to the Legislature by May 1, 2027, and every three years thereafter. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Specifies that a county human services agency may 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) Requires CDSS to do the following:
  - a) Develop a training, 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, 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. Requires the training to focus on social service program topics such as local programs that increase employability familiarity, Department of Health Care Services, and CDSS policy updates like review of CalFresh Student Eligibility Handbook and other college-student-related training.
  - b) Convene a workgroup that meets quarterly to share best practices, address challenges, and identify statewide issues, comprising all of the following:
    - i) All 58 county staff liaisons;
    - ii) At least four college campus basic needs directors, basic needs coordinators, or other designated campus staff from multiple regions and campuses;
    - 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;
    - iv) The Center for Healthy Communities at CSU, Chico; and,
    - v) 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.

- c) On or before May 1, 2027, and every 3 years thereafter, in collaboration with stakeholders, submit a legislative report with findings and recommendations relating to enrollment success trends and services offered by CDSS that may be available to students attending a public higher education institution .

- 3) Clarifies “basic needs coordinator” has the same meaning as defined in 3) and 5) below.

**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 CCCs, offices of the Chancellor of the CSU, UC 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) Establishes a “basic needs coordinator” on CSU and UC campuses 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. (Education Code [EDC] § 66023.4(b))
- 4) Defines “basic needs services and resources” on community college campuses as housing, food, clothing, feminine hygiene, diapers, technology, childcare, and mental health services and resources. (EDC § 66023.5(a))
- 5) Establishes a “basic needs coordinator” on community college campuses 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))
- 6) 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)
- 7) Establishes the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (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:

- 8) 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. (7 United States Code [USC] § 2011 *et seq.*)
- 9) 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. (7 Code of Federal Regulations § 273.5 *et seq.*)
- 10) 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:** This analysis only discusses policy issues germane to the jurisdiction of the Assembly Committee on Human Services.

**Background:** *Students in Poverty Accessing Services.* While many of the existing social safety-net programs exist to provide support to children and families, college students in California also face food, housing, and financial insecurity. Students experience unique needs while enrolled in a higher education institution due to the high cost of education in addition to living expenses. Combined with these unique needs, complicated program rules create student access barriers 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.

In February 2022, a CalFresh workgroup convened to understand how students are accessing the benefits system and process, as well as to identify recommendations to help promote student participation in the CalFresh program. The California Student Aid Commission published a report of their findings on student barriers to accessing CalFresh, which included students' lack of awareness of the program, the dearth of navigation support on campus, administrative burdens with the application process itself, and having to repeatedly provide documentation or attend appointments at inconvenient times, all while most students 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."

To help students access services, in 2022, AB 1326 (Arambula), 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 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. AB 1326 also required a statewide survey to gain insight from county and college campus staff.

Issued in December 2024, the AB 1326 Report by the Center for Healthy Communities highlighted poor student experiences and significant barriers to accessing services. According to

student surveys, 80.9% of campuses indicated that students cannot contact the county without some difficulty. Additionally, 78% of campuses reported that students cannot access eligibility workers at convenient times. Further, the survey found significant differences in experience when the student interacted with the county versus the campus. 83.8% of campuses reported “Often” or “Always” responding promptly to students, while only 11.8% of campuses stated the county “Often” or “Always” responded promptly.

The AB 1326 Report further issued recommendations to “strengthen partnerships between campuses, counties, and the state... “boost student enrollment in social service programs, address basic needs insecurity, and benefit the state economy.” The following are recommendations:

- Training and Coordination:
  - “Stated guidelines should be developed for campuses and county staff liaisons, supported by a statewide guiding document or reference.”
  - “Adopting meetings for sharing best practices is essential for consistent coordination and innovative practices.”
- Sustainable Workloads:
  - “Counties and campuses could seek best practices for long-term retention such as offering competitive pay, benefits, and providing burnout prevention strategies.”
- Engagement and Communication:
  - “Enhancing referral processes between campuses and counties is essential. This includes designating or hiring key liaisons at the campus level for programs like CalFresh Food, Medi-Cal, and CalWORKs, while fostering cross-program communication. Strengthening internal campus connectivity is also critical to streamline student support, ensuring staff across programs are well-connected.”
- Statewide Coordination:
  - “Streamlining data sharing and communication is vital for efficiency, addressing trends, and fostering best practices to increase accurate student program enrollment data.”

*Basic Needs Centers.* Basic needs centers, located on college campuses, are 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.

CCCs are required to have a basic needs center with a coordinator to assist students with housing, food, clothing, feminine hygiene, diapers, technology, childcare, mental health services, and other resources. Beginning July 1, 2025, CSUs and UCs will also be required to establish basic needs centers.

In May 2023, the Chancellor’s Office of the CCC published the first Basic Needs Services Center Report. Each of the 115 brick and mortar CCC have a Center which provides services to students and 60 college campuses provided data on services to the Chancellor’s Office. Of the 60 colleges who reported data, the number of students served by category of resource is as follows:

- 31,361 received food security services;
- 4,156 received housing security services;
- 15,179 received support for transportation insecurities;
- 1,615 received mental health services;
- 4,466 received physical health services;
- 9,091 received technology support services; and,
- 524 received child support assistance

**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 [Chapter 570] in 2021 to create a county liaison of higher education to help students navigate these challenges.

“The AB 1326 report confirms a clear lack of coordination across the state and provides key recommendations to enhance collaboration between campuses and county agencies. To ensure that all students receive support, regardless of where they attend university, [This bill] establishes a statewide network of basic needs coordinators and county liaisons of higher education to share best practices.”

**Equity Implications:** The inequities faced by today's students, particularly those from historically marginalized groups, continue to grow. The decline in federal and state funding has failed to keep up with the rising costs of earning a degree. High living costs, slow wage growth, reduced parental financial support, and the shrinking impact of state and federal grants—such as Pell Grants, which now cover significantly less of student expenses than they did in previous generations—have contributed to basic needs insecurity.

Resources that address essential needs, like food, housing, affordable healthcare, transportation, and other financial supports, are crucial for students' academic success, well-being, and ability to complete degree and certificate programs. Basic needs insecurity, particularly in housing and food, is alarmingly high in California. These insecurity rates are even more severe among historically marginalized groups, such as first-generation college students. These disparities have significant short- and long-term consequences for the state’s economy, health outcomes, innovation, and workforce development.

*This bill* aims to rectify these gaps by implementing some of the recommendations from the AB 1326 Report.

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

**RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:**

**AB 2033 (Reyes), Chapter 913, Statutes of 2024**, required each campus of the CSU and requests each campus of the UC to appoint a basic needs coordinator and establish a basic needs center by July 1, 2025, to help students access basic needs resources on and off campus.

**AB 2150 (Arambula) of 2024**, would have required county human services agencies to include basic needs directors or coordinators while developing engagement protocols with public higher education institutions; and would have required CDSS to develop and facilitate a training for basic needs directors or coordinators, and convene a workgroup. *AB 2150 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

**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**, as heard by this committee, 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 on June 17, 2021, such that it no longer fell under the jurisdiction of this committee and became a bill pertaining to elections.*

**AB 85 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 4, Statutes of 2021**, appropriated \$28.8 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**, required 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.*

*AB 214 (Weber), Chapter 134, Statutes of 2017*, required the 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 (Co-Sponsor)  
Center for Healthy Communities At California State University, Chico (Co-Sponsor)  
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations (Co-Sponsor)  
Michelson Center for Public Policy (Co-Sponsor)  
UAspire (Co-Sponsor)  
Central California Food Bank  
Community Action Partnership of Orange County  
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC) Fiscally Sponsored by Community Partners  
Food for People, the Food Bank for Humboldt County  
GLIDE  
San Diego Hunger Coalition  
San Francisco Rising  
San Francisco-Marín Food Bank  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz County  
Western Center on Law & Poverty  
Youth Leadership Institute

**Opposition**

None on file.

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