

Date of Hearing: April 14, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

AB 1996 (Bonta) – As Introduced February 17, 2026

SUBJECT: California Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council

SUMMARY: Establishes the California Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (Council) within the California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS) to develop and publish a plan with annual benchmarks to reduce child poverty by 50% within 10 years and to evaluate the impacts of state budgets, legislation, and policies on children and families. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes the Council within CalHHS and requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide staff for, and administer, the Council.
- 2) Requires the Council to convene no later than April 1, 2027, and to be cochaired by the Secretary of CalHHS or their designee and the Director of CDSS or their designee.
- 3) Requires the Council to be made up of 18 members, as follows:
 - a) The Governor shall appoint 14 members to the Council, including all of the following:
 - i) One representative from each of the following:
 1. CDSS;
 2. The California Department of Health Care Services;
 3. The California Department of Education;
 4. The State Board of Education;
 5. The California Interagency Council on Homelessness;
 6. The California Cradle-to-Career Data System;
 7. A county or regional human services agency;
 8. A statewide nonprofit focused on ending child poverty;
 9. A California Promise Neighborhood or similar place-based initiative;
 10. An organization representing immigrant families;
 - ii) Two individuals with lived experience of child or family poverty;
 - iii) One youth representative who is 16 to 25 years of age, inclusive;
 - b) The Speaker of the Assembly shall appoint two members to the Council; and,
 - c) The President pro Tempore of the Senate shall appoint two members to the Council.

- 4) Requires members of the Council to serve without compensation except for reimbursement of reasonable travel expenses.
- 5) Provides that a vacancy occurs upon the resignation, death, removal, or failure of a member to attend three consecutive meetings without good cause. Authorizes an appointing authority to remove a member for misconduct, neglect of duty, chronic nonattendance, change of employment, conflict of interest, or conduct inconsistent with the mission of the Council. Requires a vacancy to be filled by the original appointing authority within 60 days.
- 6) Prohibits a vacant seat from being counted toward a quorum.
- 7) Requires the Council to do all of the following:
 - a) Develop and publish a comprehensive plan with annual benchmarks to reduce statewide child poverty by 50% within 10 years;
 - b) Evaluate the impacts of policy proposals, including, but not limited to, expansion of refundable tax credits, guaranteed income or cash plus supports, affordable and subsidized childcare, housing and homelessness prevention, nutrition programs, behavioral health supports, workforce, and living wage pathways;
 - c) Submit an analysis of proposed budget provisions expected to affect child poverty and child well-being within 10 days of the release of both the Governor's annual Budget Proposal and the May Revision;
 - d) Review major changes to the state budget for potential impacts on children and families within 90 days of the enactment of the annual Budget Act;
 - e) Analyze pending legislation for impacts on children upon request of the Council chairs, the Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly, or the President pro Tempore of the Senate, or by majority vote of the Council;
 - f) Identify state programs or administrative processes that can be modified to reduce barriers to access and improve equity for children and families;
 - g) Hold at least four regional public hearings, including hearings during nontraditional hours to maximize participation by working families;
 - h) Submit all of the following reports to the Legislature:
 - i) An initial report by July 1, 2027;
 - ii) Comprehensive recommendations by January 1, 2028; and,
 - iii) A progress report every two years, beginning July 1, 2029.
- 8) Makes the following findings and declarations:
 - a) California is home to millions of children facing economic hardship, health disparities, educational inequities, and gaps in access to essential services;

- b) Child poverty imposes long-term social and economic costs on families, communities, and the state as a whole;
- c) The state lacks a unified structure dedicated to reducing child poverty, coordinating child-serving programs, and reviewing the statewide impacts of budgetary and legislative decisions on children;
- d) The California Health Benefits Review Program provides a proven framework for rapid and independent legislative analysis. A similar framework is needed to analyze the impacts of legislation on children; and,
- e) Legislative intent that in enacting this act to reduce child poverty in California by 50% within 10 years and to ensure that all major legislation affecting children is reviewed for evidence-based impacts.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Child Care and Developmental Services Act for the purpose of providing a comprehensive, coordinated, and cost-effective system of childcare and development services, as specified, for children from infancy to 13 years of age, and their parents, through full- and part-time programs. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 10207 *et seq.*)
- 2) Establishes the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program to provide cash assistance and other social services for low-income families through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. (WIC § 11200 *et seq.*; 11320-11329.5)
- 3) Establishes the Medi-Cal program as California's Medicaid program and is administered by the Department of Health Care Services, under which health care services are provided to qualified, low-income persons. (WIC § 14000 *et seq.*)
- 4) Establishes the CalFresh program to administer the provisions of federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to low-income families and individuals meeting specified criteria. (WIC § 18900 *et seq.*)
- 5) Establishes the state Earned Income Tax Credit for eligible taxpayers based on certain eligibility criteria. (Revenue and Taxation Code § 17052)

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

COMMENTS:

Background: *Poverty in California.* Despite California's large economy and substantial public investments in programs that support families, many children continue to experience poverty or economic hardship. According to the August 2025 Public Policy Institute of California fact sheet, *Poverty in California*,¹ the state's poverty rate increased from 15.2% in 2022 to 16.9% in

¹ <https://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/>

2023 under the California Poverty Measure, which accounts for the regional cost of living and the effects of safety-net programs. This represents approximately 6.4 million Californians living below the poverty level. Child poverty rose from 15.2% in 2022 to 17.6% in 2023, returning to roughly its pre-COVID-19 pandemic level after temporary relief programs expired.

Economic hardship affects an even larger share of the state's population when including those living near poverty. In 2023, 34.8% of Californians (13.2 million people) lived in poverty or near poverty, defined as having resources below 150% of the poverty line. A significant share of residents also experiences deep poverty, meaning they have less than half the resources needed to meet basic needs such as housing, food, and utilities.

Poverty in California is not evenly distributed across the population. Latino Californians experience the highest poverty rate at approximately 21% and represent about half (50.6%) of Californians living in poverty, despite making up about 40.7% of the population. Other groups also experience disproportionate poverty rates, including Black Californians (17.5%) and Asian American and Pacific Islander residents (15.6%), compared to 12.8% among white residents. Poverty rates are also higher among immigrant communities and individuals with lower levels of education. Foreign-born Californians have a poverty rate of roughly 21.9%, compared to 14.8% for United States-born residents, and poverty among undocumented immigrants is estimated at 36%. Educational attainment is also strongly linked to economic stability: about 28.7% of adults without a high school diploma live in poverty, compared to 7.6% of college graduates.

Research shows that poverty can significantly affect children's development and long-term outcomes. Children growing up in low-income households are more likely to experience unstable housing, food insecurity, and limited access to quality early learning opportunities and healthcare, which shape early development.² Economic hardship can also increase stress within families, affecting children's social-emotional development, cognitive growth, and school readiness. These early disparities can contribute to differences in academic achievement, educational attainment, health outcomes, and lifetime earnings. Conversely, safety net programs play a significant role in reducing poverty. In 2023, programs such as CalFresh, tax credits, housing subsidies, and school meals kept an estimated 2.6 million Californians, including about one million children, out of poverty. Without safety nets, poverty would be even higher, especially among children.

Reducing Child Poverty. California administers a number of public assistance programs to uplift those out of poverty. Many of those programs are federally funded, housed within CDSS and administered by counties, including CalFresh, CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal. Each county works to determine eligibility under federal and state standards and then helps disburse aid to recipients.

In addition to core federal programs, California has various state programs aimed at reducing child poverty through income supports, nutrition assistance, and early childhood programs, including tax credits such as the CalEIT and Young Child Tax Credit, access to subsidized childcare and preschool, and access to food assistance for immigrants, among others.

Impacts of H.R. 1 on Child Poverty. On July 1, 2025, H.R. 1 was signed into law, which is expected to significantly affect children in families receiving public benefits by reducing

² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12448094/>

eligibility, lowering benefit levels, and increasing administrative barriers across key safety net programs. Specifically, H.R. 1 includes substantial cuts to the federal SNAP, which provides food assistance benefits to low-income families. It introduced stricter work requirements and eliminated eligibility for certain lawfully present immigrants. These changes may result in reduced or terminated benefits for households with children and are projected to decrease SNAP participation, with estimates indicating that households with approximately 500,000 children could see benefit reductions of about \$100 per month and that up to 1.3 million individuals, including children, could lose assistance.³

Other changes in H.R. 1 include cuts to Medicaid and restrictions on refundable tax credits, which are expected to increase the number of children facing barriers to health coverage and income supports, compounding economic instability for low-income families. Because participation in SNAP and Medicaid is a pathway for automatic enrollment in free or reduced-price school meals, reductions in program eligibility are expected to decrease the number of children who qualify for school nutrition programs, potentially disrupting access to consistent meals during the school year and summer months.⁴ These changes are expected to increase food insecurity, reduce access to essential services, and place additional fiscal and administrative pressure on states, which may further constrain their ability to maintain or expand programs that support children and families.

This bill establishes the California Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council within CalHHS to develop a statewide plan and benchmarks to reduce child poverty by 50% within 10 years, and to evaluate the impacts of state budgets, legislation, and policies on children and families.

Author’s Statement: According to the Author, “[This bill] is grounded in the principle that every child in California deserves to grow up with stability, dignity, and access to the resources necessary to thrive. Yet today, nearly one in five children lives in a household struggling to afford basic necessities like housing, food, and healthcare—placing immense strain on families and limiting opportunities for youth through no fault of their own. As pandemic-era supports have expired and federal cuts loom, families are being asked to do more with less, and the consequences are immediate and real. The impacts are visible every day: missed meals, delayed care, preventable health inequities, and chronic stress that disproportionately burden communities already facing systemic barriers. While California has demonstrated that targeted investments can reduce child poverty, the state currently lacks a coordinated structure to sustain and build on that progress. [This bill] addresses this gap by establishing a Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council to promote accountability, align policy efforts, and ensure that the needs of children and families remain central in budget and legislative decisions. By setting a clear goal of reducing child poverty by 50 percent over the next 10 years, this bill advances an equity-driven, data-informed approach to improving outcomes for children statewide.”

Equity Implications: *This bill* creates a Council that centers around populations disproportionately impacted by poverty, including children of color, immigrant and mixed-status families, and those in high-cost or underserved regions. By requiring the Council to evaluate the impacts of budgets and legislation on children and to identify barriers to access across programs,

³ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-budget/2025-budget-impacts-house-bill-would-cut-assistance-for-children-raise>

⁴ <https://schoolnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/TAM-25-SNA-BBB-Bill-Summary.pdf>

this bill may help highlight inequities embedded in eligibility rules, administrative processes, and service delivery systems that currently limit access for the most vulnerable families.

Arguments in Support: End Child Poverty California, sponsor of the bill, writes, “The ECPCA Coalition itself was a response to the passage of the Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty Act (AB 1520, 2017). The culmination of a multi-year advocacy campaign, this legislation was a milestone accomplishment of grassroots activism and community leadership. AB 1520’s main deliverable was a comprehensive framework to reduce child and family poverty in California. This framework, the End Child Poverty Plan, handed the Coalition our first policy agenda. The Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty Task Force Report, overseen by now Secretary Kim Johnson, identified 43 evidence-based recommendations aimed at reducing child poverty and reducing child poverty in the state.

“As a catalyst for increased investment in child and family-first policies, the End Child Poverty Plan was incredibly successful. Since 2017, our coalition has been able to achieve full or partial progress on 41 of the 43 recommendations. California has invested billions to lift children and families out of poverty.

“Highlights of these bold achievements include:

- Ending Deep Child Poverty for most households by lifting CalWORKs grants above 50% of the federal poverty line unless the household has an excluded member
- First in the nation universal school meals for all, and nation-leading implementation of SUN Bucks to prevent child hunger year round
- Reimagining CalWORKs through a landmark set of initial evidence-based reforms toward a family-centered program
- First in the nation state investment in place-based partnerships through Promise Neighborhoods
- Historic progress toward universal childcare access and the true cost of care, including enabling childcare providers to collectively bargain
- Creating the Young Child and Foster Youth Tax Credits, and expanding all refundable tax credits to ITIN holders
- Establishing HOPE Accounts, the nation’s largest Baby Bonds program
- First in the nation state-funded Guaranteed Income programs
- Nation-leading wages for fast food, healthcare, and other sectors to provide pathways out of poverty
- Significant progress toward Health and Food for All

“These actions resulted in a combined investment of \$13 billion in ongoing state funds and led to 300,000 children being lifted out of poverty. This is in addition to the 650,000 children lifted out

of poverty by Biden era federal actions taken, including the expanded child tax credits and multiple stimulus payments.

“However, child poverty rates have already partly rebounded due to one-time solutions falling away, many sectors of the economy continued struggle in the post-pandemic era, and now the latest impact due to H.R. 1 cuts... We are at an inflection point. With the impending ramifications of H.R.1 expected to push millions more into poverty and widen existing racial disparities, California has an opportunity to counter the federal administration’s harmful, regressive policies and continue progress toward a more equitable future. Bold investments are needed to achieve this vision, and the time to act is now.

“California must not lose sight of its moral compass and north star agenda to end child poverty across the state. California must continue to utilize a data-driven approach to smart, effective policy development and evaluation. [This bill] will put us back on a pathway to tracking our progress on ending child poverty.”

Arguments in Opposition: None on file.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 114 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 413, Statutes of 2019, established the Early Childhood Policy Council to advise the Governor, the Legislature, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction on statewide early learning and care policy, building on the work of the state’s Master Plan and the 2019 California Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education Final Report.

SB 75 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 51, Statutes of 2019, was substantially similar to AB 114.

AB 1520 (Burke), Chapter 415, Statutes of 2017, established the Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty Task Force, consisting of specified stakeholders, for purposes of eliminating deep child poverty and reducing the overall child poverty rate in the state by 50% by 2039-40.

SB 1084 (Liu) of 2010, would have created an Economic Security Task Force and would have required it to develop recommendations for reducing poverty and increasing economic security among Californians. *SB 1084 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 690 (Jones) of 2007, would have declared that it is the goal of the Legislature to reduce childhood poverty by one half by January 1, 2018, and to eliminate it entirely by January 1, 2028. Would have required the Department of Finance to report, as part of the annual budget process, on how the Governor's Budget proposal would impact the state's goal of reducing childhood poverty and required the Legislative Analyst to analyze the report. *AB 690 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 1118 (Jones) of 2008, would have created the California Child Poverty Council for the purpose of developing a comprehensive plan for reducing child poverty in California by 50% by January 1, 2017, and eliminate it completely by January 1, 2027. *AB 1118 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 56 (Ma) of 2008, would have created a cabinet-level Secretary to End Poverty who had the responsibility to review all anti-poverty programs within the state and determine whether or not they were operating in an efficient and effective manner. *AB 56 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 2556 (Jones) of 2006, would have declared that there is a legislative goal to eliminate child poverty by January 1, 2026, and required the Department of Finance and the Legislative Analysts Office to report on the impact of the Governor's proposed budget on the goal of reducing child poverty. *AB 2556 was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger.*

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

GRACE Institute - End Child Poverty in CA (Sponsor)
California Court Appointed Special Advocate Association
California Family Resource Association
Child Abuse Prevention Center and its Affiliates Safe Kids California, Prevent Child Abuse California and the California Family Resource Association; the
First 5 Association of California

Opposition

None on file.

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