

Date of Hearing: April 7, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Lisa Calderon, Chair

AB 1326 (Arambula) – As Amended March 30, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Public social services: county liaison for higher education

**SUMMARY:** Requires 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 public higher education institutions within the county to provide information on available public social services; additionally, requires the agency to develop protocols for engagement between the staff liaison and public higher education institutions. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Makes Legislative findings and declarations regarding California student's food insecurity, housing insecurity, and challenges meeting their basic needs.
- 2) States Legislative intent to expedite the connection between students in need and critical county services.
- 3) Requires a county human services agency to designate at least one employee as a staff liaison to serve as a point of contact for academic counselors and other relevant professional staff at public higher education institutions located within the county and to provide information on programs and services offered by the agency that may be available to students attending public higher education institutions within the county; further, provides that nothing within the provisions for the staff liaison is intended to supersede any otherwise existing relationships between counties and educational institutions, as specified.
- 4) Requires a county human services agency to develop protocols for engagement between the agency and the public higher education institutions within the county and is encouraged to consult stakeholders in this process, including, but not limited to:
  - a) The County Welfare Directors Association of California;
  - b) The office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges (CCC);
  - c) The office of the Chancellor of the California State University (CSU);
  - d) The office of the President of the University of California (UC); and,
  - e) Relevant organizations representing the interests of students, faculty, and staff of public higher education institutions.
- 5) Provides that counties are encouraged to share information with the public higher education institutions in their borders regarding the location and hours of county human services agency public offices, as well as information regarding online and telephone access to program applications; further, each community college is encouraged to disseminate information regarding applying for human services programs and benefits to the community college's vice president of student services or their designee.

- 6) Requires all personal information shared between the institutions and county agencies to be made under applicable confidentiality laws.
- 7) Provides the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) with the authority to implement the provisions regarding the staff liaison through an all-county letter or similar instruction.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) pursuant to the Food Stamps Act of 1964 to provide benefits to families and individuals meeting specified criteria. (7 U.S. Code Section 2011)
- 2) Establishes the CalFresh program for the administration of federal SNAP benefits to eligible individuals. Provides program requirements and eligibility, as specified. (Welfare and Institutions Code Section [WIC] 18900 et seq.)
- 3) Provides eligibility requirements and exemptions for students under the CalFresh program. (7 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 273.5 et seq.)
- 4) Requires each public or private postsecondary educational institution located in a county that participates in the Restaurant Meals Program to meet certain requirements, as specified. (Education Code Section [EDC] 66025.93)
- 5) Establishes under federal law the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to provide aid and welfare-to-work services to eligible families. (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.)
- 6) Establishes the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS) program within California to provide TANF funds for welfare-to-work (WTW) services to eligible families. (WIC 11200 et seq.)
- 7) Requires that, as specified and to the extent funding is provided in the annual Budget Act, a community college receive funds in addition to those allotted for curriculum development and redesign to provide special services for CalWORKS recipients. (EDC 79204 et seq.)
- 8) Requires all individuals over 16 years of age, unless they are otherwise exempt, to participate in WTW activities as a condition of eligibility for CalWORKS. (WIC 11320.3)
- 9) Requires, as a condition for receiving funds for special services, community college districts and colleges to submit a report, as specified, to the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges that includes data on the use of the moneys and other factors, including, but not limited to, the number of workstudy hours provided, the number of students receiving case management, and the hourly salaries and types of jobs in which CalWORKS recipients were placed. (EDC 79207)
- 10) Establishes the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Act and defines the EBT system as the program designed to provide benefits to those eligible to receive public assistance benefits such as CalWORKS and CalFresh. (WIC 10065 et seq.)

- 11) 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)
- 12) States Legislative intent that the CalWORKs Recipients Education Program within California Community Colleges assist CalWORKs recipients prepare for employment and provides program requirements, as specified. (EDC 79200 *et seq.*)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:**

***Higher Education Student's Basic Needs:*** College students experience various unique obstacles to their academic success. As the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted, a large number of individuals pursuing higher education rely heavily on their institutions to supplement basic needs. In January 2018, the CSU Office of the Chancellor released a study in order to identify and examine the barriers students face to meeting their basic needs while working to attain their postsecondary educational goals. Overall, the study found that 10.9% of CSU students reported being homeless, and 41.6% of students reported food insecurity; of those, 20% experienced low food security and 21.6% experienced very low food security. In 2019, also before the economic downturn that came with COVID-19, CCCs conducted a survey that revealed over 50% had experienced food insecurity in the month prior, and 60% responded they were homeless or without secure housing in the past year. The UC began a study in early 2020 that aligns with these efforts to review the needs and struggles of students within their institutional system. Students who were homeless or food insecure self-reported stress, depression, and problems with emotions; these students also reported higher levels of personal concerns with anxiety, fear, irritability, and depression and reported having more physical health issues, physical illness, and injury than their housing secure peers.

**Food Insecurity:** The California Associations of Food Banks define "food insecurity" as the occasional or constant lack of access to the food one needs for a healthy, active life. Food security can be impacted by a variety of factors, including access to local healthy foods, the price of food, and the ability to store and prepare food. Individuals who face food insecurity often are forced to make decisions between nurturing their physical health or maintaining other aspects of their life, leading to serious health effects. Students often struggle to maintain this balance, and in turn, health effects impact their studies.

**Housing Insecurity:** Housing security and homelessness are common obstacles for higher education students. With the housing prices increasing each year, the average income for a college student is strained by even affordable housing options. The University of Southern California defines these terms for students as the following:

- Housing insecurity is defined as the broader set of challenges, including but not limited to, inability to pay rent or utilities, need to relocate frequently, or residing in an environment where the individual's health or safety is compromised.
- Homelessness is defined as a lack of stable, reliable, or permanent place to live and includes those residing in shelters, automobiles, motels, abandoned buildings, or outside.

***Coronavirus Pandemic:*** In March of 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom declared a statewide state of emergency in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. With over 500,000 deaths resulting from coronavirus across our country, the impact of this virus has touched almost every aspect of everyday life. We have watched as the effects of COVID-19 have added strain on California's public programs, healthcare system, and the financial security of many. The employment sways and sheltering of many sectors commonly employed by college students have left this population struggling more than ever before.

***CalFresh:*** In California, SNAP funds are administered through the CalFresh program. SNAP is the federal program that provides states funds to offer a nutritional benefit to low-income individuals and families. SNAP eligibility standards are set by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and include income tests, work requirements, and required documentation. The current maximum allowable gross income is 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL); however, households with members who are elderly or have disabilities are instead subject to a net monthly income at or below 100% of the FPL. The benefit is meant to assist with access to healthy and nutritious foods and is distributed through various sources, depending on the state. Formerly known as food stamps, the program provides specific eligibility requirements and funding to states, planning and implementing at the local level. In the state, CalFresh is under the purview of CDSS and facilitated through the county human services agencies. Federal, state, and local governments share in the financial obligation of the administration of the program. Individuals can complete the CalFresh application online, over the phone, in-person at their county CalFresh office, or through the mail, as specified. Eligible individuals in the state receive benefits through electronic cards, known as EBT cards that are used to purchase food items and seeds and plants that can be grown as food at home.

***CalWORKS:*** In California, the federal TANF, known as CalWORKs, provides eligible low-income families with cash grants to obtain education, training, and employment. CalWORKs is administered at the county level and is primarily funded through the federal block grant and maintained with state maintenance-of-effort contributions. Families participating in CalWORKs have access to a variety of services aimed at helping the family achieve self-sufficiency; these services can include child care, homelessness assistance, and services aimed at addressing mental health needs, substance use disorders, experiences of domestic violence, and learning disabilities, among others. Unless deemed exempt or otherwise not required to participate under CalWORKs program rules, parents are required to develop and participate in a WTW plan. Approved WTW activities can include: public or private sector subsidized or unsubsidized employment; on-the-job training; community service; secondary school and adult basic education; and, vocational education and training when the education is needed for the recipient to become employed, among others.

**California Community College CalWORKs Program:** The CCCs CalWORKs program, established in 1997, exists throughout the state and has approximately 30,000 CalWORKs participants enrolled in community colleges throughout the state. Community college CalWORKs programs work with local county human services offices to provide case management and various services to participants. Through the program, students can receive support including academic, career, and personal counseling involving intensive case management, coordination of child care services, career exploration, and coordination with off-campus community-based organizations for emergency assistance and on-campus student services; and on- and off-campus subsidized work-study placements. English language learners

and those seeking to complete high school equivalency programs may also be eligible for services through the CCC CalWORKs program.

***Need for this bill:*** This bill would require county human services agencies to designate a staff liaison to act as a point of contact for public higher education institutions in the county. With costs of education rising, in addition to basic costs of living, the number of students experiencing homelessness and food insecurity is also rising. The coronavirus pandemic's economic impact has increased these numbers across all populations, including youth pursuing higher education. Providing higher education institutions with a liaison that has knowledge of available public benefits through the county could provide students with more streamlined access to support.

According to the author, "Recent polls show that over one-third of college students have faced food or housing insecurity. Beyond addressing basic needs, connecting students with county health and human service programs can be critical to students' academic performance and success. Unfortunately, navigating the eligibility and enrollment process for these programs can be difficult for both college counselors and students alike. With assistance from the county, counselors and other college staff could connect students with county resources more quickly. This bill would require county human services agencies to designate a staff liaison to serve as a just such a link between counselors and county services. With liaisons routing counselors or other college staff to the appropriate program, in-need students can more rapidly find the support they need."

***Staff Comments:*** This bill requires community colleges to disseminate information regarding available human services programs to their student services representative or organization.

***Should this bill move forward, the author may wish to consider expanding this requirement to all public higher education institutions included in the provisions of the bill, as students attending UC's and CSU's could also benefit from the dissemination of information on available human services programs.***

***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 775 (Berman) of 2021,*** requires 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 is set to be heard in the Assembly Higher Education on April 8, 2021.

***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 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**

Faculty Association of California Community Colleges (Sponsor)  
California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office

**Opposition**

None on file

**Analysis Prepared by:** Emmalynn Mathis / HUM. S. / (916) 319-2089