

Date of Hearing: March 28, 2023

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Corey A. Jackson, Chair

AB 928 (Reyes) – As Introduced February 14, 2023

SUBJECT: CalFresh Data Dashboard: students.

SUMMARY: Deletes the existing requirement that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) update the CalFresh Data Dashboard with certain information related to CalFresh utilization by college students over time, and instead requires the dashboard be updated on an annual basis.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes under federal law the “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program” (SNAP) pursuant to the Food Stamp Act of 1964 and establishes, in California statute, the CalFresh program to administer the provision of federal SNAP benefits to families and individuals meeting certain criteria, as specified. (7 United States Code Section 2011 *et seq.*, Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] Section 18900 *et seq.*)
- 2) Deems, in federal regulations, an individual who is enrolled at least half-time in an institution of higher education as ineligible for participation in SNAP unless the individual qualifies for an exemption, as specified. (7 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 273.5(a))
- 3) Requires, in federal regulations, a student to meet one of the following criteria in order to qualify for an exemption to the prohibition on eligibility for SNAP benefits, including: be age 17 or younger or age 50 or older; be physically or mentally unfit; be participating in a state or federally financed work study program during the regular school year; be employed for a minimum of 20 hours per week and be paid for such employment or, if self-employed, be employed for a minimum of 20 hours per week and receive weekly earnings at least equal to the federal minimum wage multiplied by 20 hours; or be participating in a state or federally financed work-study program during the regular school year. (7 CFR 273.5(b))
- 4) Requires, no later than January 1, 2024, in order to assist in monitoring information about access to the CalFresh program by students enrolled in an institution of higher education, CDSS to publish data specific to students’ receipt of CalFresh benefits on CDSS’ existing CalFresh Data Dashboard. Further, requires the data to include metrics about student applications, demographics, and exemptions as available through existing data sources, and requires the data to exclude any personally identifiable information. (WIC 18928.5(a) and (b))
- 5) Requires CDSS to update the CalFresh Data Dashboard over time as additional data become available about students enrolled in an institution of higher education and student receipt of CalFresh benefits. (WIC 18928.5(c))

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

COMMENTS:

Background: *CalFresh:* In California, SNAP is known as CalFresh, and its primary goal is to provide food access to low-income individuals who meet certain eligibility criteria. CalFresh benefits are federally funded, and administration at the federal level lies with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); as such, it is the responsibility of the USDA to set specific eligibility requirements for SNAP programs across the country in addition to the gross and net income tests, work requirements, and other documentation requirements that is prescribed by the USDA. Currently, the maximum allowable gross income is 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, although households with elderly members or members with disabilities are not subject to gross income criteria. Effective October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023, the maximum annual gross income for a household size of three is \$46,080.

Since 2014, CDSS has maintained publicly-accessible CalFresh data and trends on its CalFresh Data Dashboard, including annual CalFresh caseload numbers, timeliness and accuracy rates, churn measurements, and demographic data, among others. According to the Dashboard, as of January 2023, there were 5,260,585 individuals receiving CalFresh.

Hunger among college students: A White Paper published in March 2022 titled “CalFresh for College Students: Equitable and Just Access” discussed the high rates of hunger among college students, and states:

“Hunger, in addition to being a dehumanizing experience and one that causes short and long-term health and mental health consequences, is especially problematic among college students because it has negative impacts on their academic success, rendering them more likely to drop out before graduating and undermining the investments that they and our financial aid programs have made.

“This high rate of hunger is a result of the high cost of college stagnating pell-grants and federal funds for work study and federal laws which limit access to the country’s most important anti-hunger program, SNAP. The SNAP Student Rule dates back to the 1970s from a radically different college environment. This ‘work for food’ policy is underscored by outdated stereotypes of the ‘starving college student’.”

An April 2019 report by the Legislative Analyst’s Office found that 44% of undergraduates and 26% of graduate students in California experience food insecurity, and data from the University of California (UC) demonstrated that students who experience food and/or housing challenges have lower grade point averages (GPA) and graduation rates compared to students who have their basic needs met. GPA and graduation gaps were found to be larger for students with intersectional identities across first-generation, LGBT+, underrepresented ethnic minorities, and community college transfers. A February 2022 study from the California Policy Lab found that only 10% of community college students, 12% of UC undergraduate students, and 4% of UC graduate students were enrolled in CalFresh during the 2019-2020 academic year.

CalFresh Student Rule: In order to meet the federal definition of “student”, as it applies to CalFresh eligibility, an individual must: be between the ages of 18 and 49; be physically and mentally “fit” for employment; and, be enrolled at least “half time” in regular curriculum at an “institution of higher education” in which the regular curriculum meets the standard requirements for graduation or certification in a particular field of study. “Higher education” is further defined as a business, trade, technical or vocational school, or a junior, community, two-

year or four-year college, university, or graduate school, regardless of whether a high school diploma or GED is required. An individual who meets this definition is rendered ineligible for CalFresh benefits unless they meet at least one of the following exemptions in which they:

- 1) Are participating in paid work for an average of 20 hours per week or a total of 80 hours per month;
- 2) Are participating in work study;
- 3) Have a child under the age of twelve without adequate child care;
- 4) Are a single parent responsible for a child under twelve;
- 5) Are attending school as part of a CalFresh Employment and Training Program;
- 6) Are attending school as part of a program to increase employment;
- 7) Are receiving CalWORKs cash assistance; or,
- 8) Meet additional qualifying exemptions, as specified in current law.

Temporary expansions to CalFresh eligibility: On December 27, 2020, in recognition of the widespread rates of hunger among college students and in addition to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, President Trump signed the “Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021”, which authorized temporary changes to the CalFresh student eligibility rule. In a February 2, 2021, memo issued by the USDA, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 added the following two new temporary exemptions to the existing list of exemptions:

- 1) The individual is eligible to participate in a State or Federally financed work study program during the regular school year, as determined by the institution of higher education; or,
- 2) The individual has an expected family contribution of \$0 in the current academic year.

The memo also stated that the temporary student exemptions must remain in effect until 30 days after the COVID-19 Federal public health emergency is lifted. On January 30, 2023, the Biden Administration announced that it would end the public health emergency declarations on May 11, 2023; as such, the temporary expansions to CalFresh eligibility will expire on June 10, 2023.

Author’s Statement: According to the author, “The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be felt by California’s most vulnerable residents. The skyrocketing cost of food, coupled with the elimination of pandemic-era flexibilities, will devastate those members of our community who are already struggling. This includes college students, some of whom for the last few years, have enjoyed the support of CalFresh benefits due to temporary flexibility in eligibility rules. This bill would require CDSS to update the CalFresh data dashboard on an annual basis in order to fully understand the landscape of college student utilization of the CalFresh program. This bill is a step toward decreasing hunger among our college students.”

Need for this bill: The provisions of this bill seek to increase the frequency with which CDSS must update its CalFresh Data Dashboard with certain information, such as application and demographic data, regarding student receipt of CalFresh benefits. Specifically, this bill requires the dashboard be updated with this information on an annual basis, rather than over time, which

is the current frequency enumerated in statute. By requiring more frequent updates, this bill seeks to ensure that year-over-year data regarding CalFresh applications and receipt by college students, as well as demographic data of those individuals, is available. The provisions of this bill and the subsequent availability of this data could help to further inform discussions regarding college student hunger and provide for data-driven decision making in the future.

Equity Implications: The provisions of this bill may also inform discussions regarding the disparate nature of hunger and food insecurity on California college campuses, as current law requires certain demographic data be included on the CalFresh Data Dashboard. A 2021 Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute journal article entitled “Covid-19 and College Students: Food Security Status before and after the Onset of a Pandemic” states:

“Prior to COVID-19, college students were disproportionately affected by financial stress and food insecurity. This has been attributed to more students with low income going to college, higher college costs, insufficient student aid, a weak labor market for part-time workers, and SNAP policies that exclude many students from participation, among other reasons. A 2017 systematic review found that food insecurity affected 32.9% of college students in the US...Food insecurity rates are higher among certain college student demographic segments, including racial/ethnic minorities, younger students, international students, students with children, financially independent students, and Pell grant recipients.”

As outlined above, food insecurity directly impacts school performance. Given that GPA and graduation gaps were found to be larger for students with intersectional identities across first-generation, LGBT+, underrepresented ethnic minorities, and community college transfers, there is work to be done to understand correlation.

By requiring annual data be reported on the Dashboard, the provisions of this bill could help inform data-driven policy, thereby potentially reducing ethnic, age, and income disparities among college students who experience hunger and food insecurity.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 641 (Skinner), Chapter 874, Statutes of 2022, required CDSS to convene a workgroup to identify any necessary changes to improve access to CalFresh for college students, and required CDSS to submit a report to the state estimating additional funds needed to adequately serve all college students currently eligible for CalFresh benefits.

AB 132 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 144, Statutes of 2021, provided, among other things, \$100 million one-time monies to address California community college student basic needs including food insecurity and to assist homeless and housing-insecure students in securing stable housing.

SB 77 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Statutes of 2019, Chapter 53, required CDSS’s CalFresh and Nutrition Branch to convene the CalFresh Student Data Workgroup to compile statewide data on college student participation in CalFresh and to provide recommendations for improving CalFresh access among college students.

AB 1229 (Wicks) of 2019, would have required CDSS to establish an official approval process to ensure that foster youth who participate in an internship may apply those work hours toward

meeting eligibility standards as a student in the CalFresh program, among other changes.

AB 1229 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.

AB 1894 (Weber), Chapter 746, Statutes of 2018, authorized CDSS to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Chancellor of the California State University (CSU) in order to allow any qualifying food facility located on a CSU campus to participate in the restaurant meals program (RMP), even if the CSU campus is located in a county that does not participate in the RMP.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Student Aid Commission
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations

Opposition

None on file

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