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SB-628 State Healthy Food Access Policy. (2023-2024)

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Senate Bill No. 628

CHAPTER 879

An act to add Chapter 9.5 (commencing with Section 18700) to Part 6 of Division 9 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to food access.

[Approved by Governor October 13, 2023. Filed with Secretary of State October 13, 2023.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 628, Hurtado. State Healthy Food Access Policy.

Existing law establishes various food assistance programs, including, among others, the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known in California as CalFresh, under which supplemental nutrition assistance benefits allocated to the state by the federal government are distributed to eligible individuals by each county.

This bill would declare that it is the established policy of the state that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food. The bill would require all relevant state agencies to consider this state policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations, and grant criteria when those policies, regulations, and grant criteria are pertinent to the distribution of sufficient affordable food.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

(b) The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated hunger for many, particularly for populations who are barred from SNAP due to their immigration status, those that struggle with their mental health, and those who are unhoused. These groups were unable to utilize the many benefits associated with SNAP participation.

(c) The four guideposts in determining food security are availability, stability of supply, access, and use.

(d) Nations and states that have dependable trade relationships and sustainable natural resources are more successful in providing food security.

(e) The world's population is expected to grow significantly in the coming years and there is growing concern that global crop yields are not increasing at the rate required to support that population growth.

(f) Climate change is already, and is likely to continue, threatening food production and certain aspects of food quality globally, as well as food prices and distribution systems.

(g) Crop yields are predicted to decline because of the combined effects of changes in rainfall, severe weather patterns, increasing competition from weeds, and pest infestations. Livestock and fish production are also projected to decline. Prices are expected to rise in response to declining food production and increases in the price of petroleum, which is used in pesticides and fertilizers and for transporting food.

(h) Adaptation activities are needed to reduce impacts of the anticipated food security challenges.

(i) More than 50 years since the first White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health, the United States has yet to end hunger and is facing an urgent, nutrition-related health crisis, the rising prevalence of diet-related diseases such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and certain cancers. The consequences of food insecurity and diet-related diseases are significant, far reaching, and disproportionately impact historically underserved communities. Food insecurity and diet-related diseases are largely preventable if we prioritize the health of the nation. Making progress requires collective, sustained action and mobilization across every segment of society.

(j) President Joseph Biden announced a goal of ending hunger and increasing healthy eating and physical activity by 2030 so fewer Americans experience diet-related disease, while reducing related health disparities.

SEC. 2. Chapter 9.5 (commencing with Section 18700) is added to Part 6 of Division 9 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, to read:

CHAPTER 9.5. State Healthy Food Access Policy

18700. (a) (1) It is hereby declared to be the established policy of the state that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food.

(2) Food insecurity is defined as the occasional or constant lack of access to the food one needs to live a healthy life and the uncertainty of being able to acquire enough food to meet the needs of an individual or household due to insufficient money or other resources.

(b) All relevant state agencies, including, but not limited to, the State Department of Social Services, the Department of Food and Agriculture, the State Department of Health Care Services, the State Department of Education, and the State Department of Public Health, shall consider this state policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations, and grant criteria when those policies, regulations, and criteria are pertinent to the distribution of sufficient affordable food.

(c) This section does not expand any obligation of the state to provide food or nutrition assistance or to require the expenditure of additional resources to develop food infrastructure.