

March 29, 2021

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel
State Capitol P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0045

RE: AB-396 CalFresh: educational program
AAP-CA Position: SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Gabriel,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA) representing over 3,000 pediatrician members strongly supports AB 396 as introduced on February 3, 2021, requiring higher education programs that qualify under the Employment and Training (E&T) Services student exemption to be certified by California Department of Social Services (DSS) by June 2022.

Many students on California's college campuses experience food insecurity and hunger. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these economic and basic needs issues for students. A recent report from the Hope Center shows that almost 3 out of every 5 students said they were experiencing basic needs insecurity during the pandemic. The report also highlights the heightened basic needs insecurity threatening retention for students of color. 74% of Indigenous and 71% of Black students responding to the survey reported facing basic needs insecurity, illustrating how the pandemic has magnified pervasive racial disparities.¹

Current federal law stipulates that in order to receive CalFresh benefits, students must meet certain work requirements unless they are eligible for exemptions such as the Employment and Training (E&T) services program exemption. E&T offers individuals receiving food benefits opportunities to build skills towards employment. Federal regulations allow students to qualify for this exemption if they receive equivalent E&T training from a qualifying program at a higher education institution. Many of California's institutions of higher education, including the California State Universities and Universities of California, community colleges, vocational schools, and graduate schools have programs that qualify under the E&T exemption that would, upon approval, grant CalFresh benefits to thousands of students in need. Unfortunately, most of these programs have not applied, leaving thousands of students in want of well-deserved CalFresh benefits.

AB 396 will require higher education programs that qualify under the E&T exemption to certify themselves with the DSS by June of 2022, increasing the number of students eligible for CalFresh and ensuring that California takes full advantage of federal funding to support students in need at no additional cost to the state. AAP-CA strongly supports AB 396. Thank you for your public service and leadership on behalf of the health and wellbeing of children, youth, and families in California.

Sincerely,



Angela Dangvu, MD FAAP
Member, State Government Affairs Committee
American Academy of Pediatrics, California

cc: AAP Leadership

¹ <https://hope4college.com/realcollege-during-the-pandemic/>