

Date of Hearing: April 8, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 1361 (Bains) – As Amended March 26, 2025

**SUBJECT:** University of California: school of medicine in the County of Kern: feasibility study.

**SUMMARY:** Establishes the County of Kern Grow Our Own Medical School Feasibility Study Act. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the University of California (UC), on or before January 1, 2027, do both of the following:
  - a) Complete a feasibility study, in consultation with local voluntary stakeholders, including, but not limited to, the Kern County Medical Society, the Kern Medical Hospital Authority, Kern Family Health Care, at least one labor union representing UC patient care and technical employees, and at least one labor union representing health care workers in the County of Kern, to determine the steps necessary to establish a UC medical school in Kern County;
    - i) The feasibility study must include a comprehensive analysis of the requirements, challenges, and opportunities related to establishing a UC medical school in Kern County, including, but not limited to, all of the following:
      - (1) The identification of potential sites for the medical school;
      - (2) An assessment of construction and infrastructure needs for the medical school;
      - (3) Recommended recruitment strategies for qualified faculty and staff;
      - (4) Development of a medical education curriculum;
      - (5) An analysis of requirements for obtaining licensure and accreditation from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME);
      - (6) A financial analysis, including, but not limited to, projected costs and potential funding sources; and,
      - (7) A review of graduate medical education opportunities in Kern County and recommendations on how to ensure that graduates of the County of Kern medical school have access to a medical residency in Kern County.
    - b) Submit the feasibility study, including detailed findings, recommendations, and an implementation timeline, to the Governor and the Legislature, as specified.
  - b) Submit the feasibility study, including detailed findings, recommendations, and an implementation timeline, to the Governor and the Legislature, as specified.
- 2) Requires the UC to make the feasibility study submitted, pursuant to (1)(b) above, also available in an electronic format on the UC's internet website.

- 3) Creates an urgency clause in order to address the significant adverse health impacts of the shortage of physicians serving the residents of Kern County.
- 4) States the following findings and declarations of the Legislature:
  - a) There is a growing need for health care professionals in California, particularly in underserved regions, including Kern County;
  - b) Establishing a UC medical school in the County of Kern will help address this need by training the next generation of medical professionals and improving access to health care in the region;
  - c) The state has established an endowment fund to support the development of a UC medical school in the County of Kern; and,
  - d) A comprehensive feasibility study is necessary to determine the specific requirements and steps for establishing this medical school, including site selection, construction needs, faculty recruitment, curriculum development, and licensure.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the UC as a public trust to be administered by the Regents of the UC; and, grants the Regents full powers of organization and government, subject only to such legislative control as may be necessary to insure security of its funds, compliance with the terms of its endowments, statutory requirements around competitive bidding and contracts, sales of property and the purchase of materials, goods and services (Article IX, Section (9)(a) of the California Constitution).
- 2) Creates the UC San Francisco, San Joaquin Valley Regional Campus Medical Education Endowment Fund. Stipulates that upon appropriation by the Legislature, moneys in the endowment fund must be allocated to the UC to support the annual operating costs for the development, operation, and maintenance of a branch campus of the UC San Francisco, School of Medicine in the San Joaquin Valley;
- 3) Requires, upon appropriation by the Legislature and a determination by the Controller of sufficient funds in the endowment fund, moneys in the fund to be used to cover the UC's estimated costs of applying for and obtaining approval and accreditation from the LCME, as provided; and,
- 4) Requires moneys in the endowment fund to initially be invested with the goal of achieving capital appreciation to create a balance of \$500 hundred million to generate ongoing earnings to cover the estimated annual operating costs associated with the development, operation, and maintenance of the branch campus, and, upon the determination of the Controller that the endowment fund balance is \$500 hundred million, requires moneys in the endowment fund to be invested to generate earnings to fund annual operating costs associated with the development, operation, and maintenance of the branch campus (Education Code (EC) Section 92162, et seq.).
- 5) Establishes the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund for the purposes of supporting the operating costs associated with establishing a branch campus of an existing

UC Medical School in Kern County. Stipulates that moneys in the endowment fund must be allocated to the UC, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to support the annual operating costs for the development, operation, and maintenance of a branch campus of an existing UC School of Medicine in the County of Kern, to conduct a feasibility study related to that branch campus, and to generate funding through investment earnings for the support of medical education in the San Joaquin Valley. Further, existing law requires that any funds public or private, received for or generated by the endowment fund shall supplement, not supplant, any current or future funding. Any funds allocated from the endowment fund shall supplement, not supplant, the UC budget allocations for any fiscal year (EC Section 92168, et seq.).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** *Urgency clause.* This measure contains an urgency clause in order to immediately address the significant adverse health impacts of the shortage of physicians serving the residents of Kern County.

*San Joaquin Valley (SJV).* The SJV is defined as encompassing the Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare counties. According to a report by the UC, entitled, *Improving Health Care Access in the San Joaquin Valley – A Regional Approach through Collaboration and Innovation*, the SJV has long-standing shortages of physicians and other health care professionals. A health workforce assessment of the SJV conducted by the UC found that the region has the lowest ratios of licensed MDs, DOs, NPs, RNs, marriage and family therapists, licensed counselors, and licensed social workers per 100,000 population in California and the second lowest ratios of PAs, CNs, and psychologists per capita. These and other findings show that action will be needed to ensure that the SJV has sufficient supplies of health professionals for meeting its future needs.

Further, according to an article entitled, “A UC Merced Medical Program is Slowly Taking Shape,” published by *CalMatters* on July 8, 2024, the SJV is home to approximately 4.3 million people. The area is also known for having terrible air quality, high levels of chronic disease like diabetes and obesity, and insufficient medical providers. It is found that the SJV has 47 primary care doctors for every 100,000 residents. Comparing that data point to the San Francisco Bay Area it is found that said area has 80 primary care physicians for every 100,000 people; and, when it comes to specialty care, 81 specialists per 100,000 people work in SJV, but the Bay Area has more than twice that number. The article also found that some residents of the SJV schedule medical appointments over a year in advance because of the lack of doctors available to see them.

*Need for the measure.* According to the author, “AB 1361 is a crucial step toward addressing the severe physician shortage in California’s rural communities, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley. With some of the lowest ratios of healthcare providers in the state and a declining number of medical students from rural backgrounds, urgent action is needed to ensure access to quality care. By requiring a feasibility study for a UC medical school in Kern County, AB 1361 paves the way for expanding medical education in the region, ultimately helping to train and retain doctors who understand and are committed to serving rural populations. This investment is essential to building a healthier future for some of California’s most underserved communities.”

Additionally, the author states that, “with some of the lowest ratios of healthcare providers in the state and a declining number of medical students from rural backgrounds, urgent action is needed to ensure access to quality care. By requiring a feasibility study for a UC medical school in Kern County, AB 1361 paves the way for expanding medical education in the region, ultimately helping to train and retain doctors who understand and are committed to serving rural populations. This investment is essential to building a healthier future for some of California’s most underserved communities.”

This measure, in part, requires the UC to complete a feasibility study to determine the steps necessary to establish a UC school of medicine in Kern County.

*UC Medical Education in the SJV.* The UC San Francisco (UCSF) Fresno was established in 1975 as a graduate medical education campus of the UCSF School of Medicine, with support from the State Legislature and the Veteran's Administration to address the severe shortage of physicians in California's San Joaquin Valley.

Today, UCSF Fresno is the largest academic physician training program in between San Francisco, Sacramento, and Los Angeles. According to the 2022-23 UCSF Fresno Annual Report, *Improving Health in the San Joaquin Valley*. Further, as a way for UC Merced (UCM) to begin to build partnerships with existing UC medical schools and facilitate its involvement with academic medicine, UCM partnered with the UC Davis (UCD) School of Medicine to help develop a new medical education program focusing on the health needs of the region.

The SJV Program in Medical Education (PRIME) was launched in 2011 by UCD, in partnership with UCSF Fresno and UCM, to recruit and prepare students for future careers in medicine in the SJV. The SJV PRIME students complete their basic sciences/pre-clinical education at UCD, then complete most of their required third-year core clerkships at UCSF Fresno, with options for selecting the amount of time spent in the fourth year at UCSF Fresno or UCD. In 2018-19, management and oversight of the SJV PRIME program transitioned from UCD to UCSF.

The UC Merced medical education program project is currently in development and is the university system's newest medical education program. The program's development began more than a decade ago. In 2008, UCM engaged the Washington Advisory Group (WAG) to assist in scoping the planning effort for the new medical school, on the premise that, even with the economic uncertainty brought on by the recession, the question regarding a medical school was not "if" but "when." The WAG report envisioned a three-stage process in developing a fully independent medical school:

- 1) Establish a pre-baccalaureate Biomedical Education track specifically designed to attract undergraduates of exceptional promise to pursue a BS degree emphasizing the health needs of the SJV and that prepares students for advanced study in all of the health sciences.
- 2) Establish a branch campus to an existing medical school. This model has been used successfully at other medical schools. For example, the medical school at the UC Riverside was a branch of the UC Los Angeles medical school prior to becoming independent.
- 3) Obtain licensure as a fully-independent medical school.

*Committee comments and amendments.* Committee Staff understands that the intent and goal of the author is to build upon existing law, which, in part, creates the UC Kern County Medical

Education Endowment Fund for the purposes of supporting the operating costs associated with establishing a branch campus of an existing UC medical school in Kern County. However, as this measure is currently drafted, it appears that the feasibility study would evaluate steps for the creation of a brand new medical school before necessary action is taken for the establishment of a branch campus in Kern County.

Further, as drafted, the measure inadvertently references terms that are not aligned to the academic terminology.

Lastly, understanding the current fiscal status of the State, and that the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund is in an early phase of receiving funds, an appropriation by the Legislature for the enactment of this measure is deemed a prudent policy and fiscal response.

*With the aforementioned in mind, the Committee recommends, and the author has agreed to accept, all of the following amendments:*

92170. (2) Establishing a **branch campus of an existing** University of California medical school in the County of Kern will help address this need by training the next generation of medical professionals and improving access to health care in the region.

(3) The state has established an endowment fund to support the development of a **branch campus of an existing** University of California medical school in the County of Kern.

(4) A comprehensive feasibility study is necessary to determine the specific requirements and steps for establishing this **a branch campus of an existing** medical school, including site selection, construction needs, faculty recruitment, **adequate resources, clinical practice agreements,** curriculum development, and licensure **accreditation.**

(b) Notwithstanding Section 67400, the University of California shall, ~~on or before January 1, 2027,~~ **upon appropriation by the Legislature,** do both of the following:

(1) (A) Complete a feasibility study, ~~in consultation with local voluntary stakeholders,~~ **and reasonably attempt to consult with local stakeholders,** including, but not limited to, the Kern County Medical Society, the Kern Medical Hospital Authority, Kern Family Health Care, at least one labor union representing University of California patient care and technical employees, and at least one labor union representing health care workers in the County of Kern, to determine the steps necessary to establish a **branch campus of an existing** University of California medical school in the County of Kern.

(B) The feasibility study shall include a comprehensive analysis of the requirements, challenges, and opportunities related to establishing a **branch campus of an existing** University of California medical school in the County of Kern, including, but not limited to, all of the following:

(i) The identification of potential sites for the **branch campus of a** medical school.

(ii) An assessment of construction and infrastructure needs for the **branch campus of a** medical school: **and assessment of ability to comply with all the resources required by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education.**

~~(iv) Development of a medical education curriculum.~~

~~(v) (iv) An analysis of requirements for obtaining licensure and accreditation from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education. **Evaluation of ability to comply with accreditation requirements from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education as a branch campus.**~~

**(vi)** A review of graduate medical education opportunities in the County of Kern and recommendations on how to ensure that graduates of the **branch campus of a medical school in the** County of Kern ~~medical school~~ have access to a medical residency in the County of Kern.

(2) (A) Notwithstanding Section 10231.5 of the Government Code, submit the feasibility study, including detailed findings, recommendations, and an implementation timeline, **on or before two years from the date of the appropriation,** to the Governor and the Legislature, consistent with Section 9795 of the Government Code.

*Arguments in support.* According to CPCA Advocates - Subsidiary of the California Primary Care Association, “the physician shortage has reached a critical stage in the United States and, in particular, in California. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, it projects that the United States could see an estimated shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2034, including major shortages in primary and specialty care. About a third of Californians live in areas where there is a shortage of primary care physicians. The shortage is particularly acute in rural areas such as the San Joaquin Valley.”

The CPCA Advocates contend that, “this is of particular concern for the Latinx community in California. The Latinx community comprises 40% of the state’s population but only seven percent of all physicians. This lack of physician diversity is not only an issue within the profession but exacerbates disparities for hard-to-reach Latinx communities. The lack of culturally and linguistically competent medical providers in California seriously exacerbates the problems of accessing medical care in non-English dominant communities. In Kern County, over 55% of the population identifies as Hispanic.”

The CPCA states that, “AB 1631 builds off the author’s successful efforts last year to move forward and continue the progress of bringing a medical school to the Central Valley. For all these reasons, CPCA Advocates is proud to support AB 1361.”

*Related legislation.* AB 58 (Soria), which is pending a hearing by this Committee, in part, requests the UC to submit a report to the Legislature, on or before August 31, 2026, on the financial requirements necessary to expand the current UCSF and UC Merced medical education collaboration, the San Joaquin Valley PRIME+ program, and to transition the program into a fully independent medical school operated by the UC Merced.

AB 730 (Arambula), which is pending a hearing by this Committee, in part, on or before July 1, 2026, and each July 1 thereafter, appropriate \$15,000,000 from the General Fund (GF) to the UC Regents for allocation to the UC Merced Medical Education Collaborative, as defined.

*Prior legislation.* AB 2357 (Bains), Chapter 959, Statutes of 2024, in part, establishes the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund for the purposes of supporting the operating costs associated with establishing a branch campus of an existing UC medical school in Kern County.

AB 3081 (Arambula) of the 2023-24 Legislative Session, which was held on the Suspense File in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, would have appropriated \$15 million from the GF to the Regents of the UC on or before July 1, 2025, and each July 1 thereafter, for allocation to the UC Merced (UCM) Medical Education Collaborative, and requires UCM Medical Education Collaborative, as a condition of receiving the appropriation, to develop a program, consistent with its mission, and in conjunction with the health facilities of its medical residency programs, to identify eligible medical residents and to assist those medical residents in applying for physician retention programs.

AB 2202 (Gray), Chapter 756, Statutes of 2018, which, in part, established the UCSF San Joaquin Valley Regional Campus Medical Education Endowment Fund to support the annual operating costs of a branch campus of UCSF School of Medicine in the SJV.

AB 2232 (Gray) of 2014, AB 174 (Gray) of 2015, SB 841 (Cannella) of 2014, and SB 131 (Cannella) of 2015, all of which appropriated funds for the SJV PRIME Program, were held on the Suspense File in the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

#### **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

##### **Support**

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 3299  
County of Kern  
CPCA Advocates - Subsidiary of the California Primary Care Association  
Kern Family Health Care  
Kern Medical

##### **Opposition**

None on file.

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