

Date of Hearing: April 21, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 1547 (Bains) – As Introduced January 6, 2026

SUBJECT: University of California: branch campus of a school of medicine in the County of Kern: feasibility study.

SUMMARY: Establishes the Kern School of Medicine Feasibility Act. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the University of California (UC), on or before January 1, 2028, to do both of the following:
 - a) Complete a feasibility study 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 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 branch campus of an existing UC medical school in Kern County; and,
 - i) The feasibility study must include a comprehensive analysis of the requirements, challenges, and opportunities related to establishing a branch campus of an existing UC medical school in Kern County including, but not limited to, all of the following:
 - (1) The identification of potential sites for the branch campus of a medical school;
 - (2) An assessment of construction and infrastructure needs for the branch campus of a medical school, and an assessment of the ability to comply with all the resource requirements of the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME);
 - (3) Recommended recruitment strategies for qualified faculty and staff;
 - (4) An evaluation of the ability to comply with the accreditation requirements of the LCME as a branch campus;
 - (5) Development of a medical education curriculum;
 - (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 branch campus of a medical school in Kern County 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.

- 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) Contains 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 branch campus of an existing UC medical school in the Kern County 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 branch campus of an existing UC medical school in the Kern County; and,
 - d) A comprehensive feasibility study is necessary to determine the specific requirements and steps for establishing a branch campus of an existing medical school, including site selection, construction needs, faculty recruitment, adequate resources, clinical practice agreements, curriculum development, and accreditation.

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) Establishes UC, CSU, and California Community Colleges (CCC) as the three segments of public higher education (Education Code (EC) Section 66010, et seq.).
- 3) Grants the UC the exclusive jurisdiction in public higher education over instruction in the profession of law and over graduate instruction in the professions of medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine. Stipulates that the UC has the sole authority in public higher education to award the doctoral degree in all fields of learning, except that it may agree with the CSU to award joint doctoral degrees in selected fields. Mandates that the UC to be the primary state-supported academic agency for research (EC Section 66010.4).
- 4) 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;

- 5) 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,
- 6) 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.).
- 7) Creates the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund in the State Treasury to support potential development of a UC medical school in Kern County. Funds received by the UC or the Controller, for specified purposes of the fund must be deposited into the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund. Defines "endowment fund" as the UC Kern County Medical Education Endowment Fund (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.

Purpose. According to the author, "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 1547 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."

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, doctors of osteopathic medicine, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, marriage and family therapists, licensed counselors, and licensed social workers per 100,000 population in California and the second lowest ratios of physician assistants, clinical nurse specialists, 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.

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.

This measure requires UC to complete a feasibility study, in consultation with local stakeholders, to determine the steps necessary to establish a UC medical school branch campus in Kern County. The study will consist of a comprehensive analysis of the requirements, challenges, and opportunities related to establishing the campus.

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.

According to the January 2026 California Health Care Almanac Regional Market Report, by the California Health Care Foundation, the UCSF Fresno program, in its 50th year, trains third- and fourth-year medical students and residents and fellows each year. The SJV Program in Medical Education (PRIME) trains a cohort of 12 medical students to address the needs of underserved populations in the broader Central Valley. The graduate medical education (GME) training programs include family and community medicine, internal medicine, obstetrics/gynecology, orthopedic surgery, pediatrics, psychiatry, and several other specialties.

UCSF Fresno faculty and residents in training provide access to crucial specialty services through multispecialty training. Saint Agnes Medical Center has six accredited GME training programs, several of which are affiliated with UCSF Fresno. Many UCSF Fresno faculty members are affiliated with Inspire Health Medical Group. One regional expert noted that UCSF Fresno was the only provider in the region for some specialty services.

UCSF Fresno has created programs across educational settings to inspire and prepare students to enter medicine. For example, the UCSF Fresno Junior Doctors Academy starts in middle school. In Fresno high schools, there are two Doctors Academies and internship programs. Added to this continuum are premed training and career development programs at regional community colleges, UC Merced, UCSF Fresno, and Fresno State University.

The PRIME+ program, a collaboration among UCSF, UCSF Fresno, and UC Merced, plans to increase the training cohort to 50 and to include bachelor's and medical degrees. The plan, launched in 2023, established UC Merced as a regional branch of the UCSF Medical School. By 2027, UC Merced will welcome the first class of PRIME+ students to the regional UCSF medical school on the UC Merced campus. Together UC Merced and UCSF Fresno will become a full four-year regional medical school campus of UCSF. To accomplish this, the PRIME+ partners will seek to increase training capacity at local hospitals and clinics, recruit and diversify physician faculty members, and seek additional GME funding.

Lastly, the report shared that an expert observed that the San Joaquin Valley, compared to more urban areas, has less infrastructure to support medical training and that developing these resources and partnership has taken time.

According to the UCOP in one of its reports to the UC Regents Board on March 20, 2025, in 2020, the UCSF School of Medicine received a base budget augmentation of \$15 million in ongoing state support to develop an eight-year baccalaureate/MD program based in the SJV in partnership with the UCSF Fresno regional campus and UC Merced. Built on the success of the SJV PRIME program launched in 2010, SJV PRIME+ was designed for students from the SJV region who wish to remain in the area for both college and medical school, which will increase the likelihood of them practicing there upon graduation.

In fall 2023, the inaugural class of 15 students, all of whom have deep ties to the SJV enrolled in an enhanced baccalaureate degree program at UC Merced, designed to prepare them for success in medical school. This new track will enable UC Merced to build the capacity to offer the classroom-based medical school curriculum, which the students will complete during the first 18 months of medical school starting in fall 2027. Students will complete their clinical experiences during the remaining 2.5 years of medical school at the UCSF Fresno regional campus.

Both SJV PRIME and SJV PRIME+ represent the first part of a three-phased approach to expanding medical education in the SJV. During phase two, the goal is to increase enrollment from 12 to 15 students to 50 per year starting in 2027, which will result in 200 total students enrolled in the program by 2030. Building the infrastructure and capacity to reach phase two will be foundational to advancing to phase three which has the goal of establishing an independent medical school at UC Merced. The achievement of these phased goals will require long-term partnerships with affiliate health care facilities to provide reliable clinical training experiences, increases in medical school faculty, additional resource support for accreditation compliance, new infrastructure at UC Merced and UCSF Fresno, and additional residency positions commensurate with the increase in the number of medical students.

Arguments in support. According to the Kern County Superintendent of Schools, “Kern County is home to a diverse student population of which approximately 73% are socioeconomically disadvantaged. For many of these students, the jump from high school to a stable, well-paying career often feels uncertain or out of reach. AB 1547 (Bains) helps bridge that gap by expanding career-connected learning and increasing access to industry-aligned training in high school and beyond. For many young people in our region, seeing a future in higher education begins with seeing a future in a career. AB 1547 (Bains) helps ignite that spark. The reality of a medical school in Kern County would expand partnerships between schools, employers, and workforce programs, creating new opportunities for students to build skills, earn certifications, and find meaningful purpose in the workforce.”

Related legislation. AB 1852 (Bains), which failed passage in this Committee, in part, creates a fallback mechanism for establishing a public medical school in Kern County if, by July 1, 2027, the UC Office of the President has not taken formal, verifiable steps to establish a school of medicine in Kern County. Further, the measure authorizes the California State University Bakersfield and the Kern Community College District, acting through a newly authorized local public agency called the Kern Medical Education Authority, to establish and operate a medical school in Kern County, subject to accreditation.

Prior legislation. AB 58 (Soria) of 2025, which was held on suspense in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, 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 1361 (Bains) of 2025, which was held on suspense in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, is similar to this measure.

AB 730 (Arambula) of 2025, which was held on suspense in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, 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.

AB 1361 (Bains) of 2025, which was held on suspense in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, in part, required the UC, on or before January 1, 2027, to 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.

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 suspense 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 in the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

County of Kern
Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office

Opposition

None on file.

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