

Date of Hearing: April 23, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

AB 1278 (Gabriel) – As Amended March 26, 2019

SUBJECT: Public postsecondary educational institutions: public services and programs: internet website notification

SUMMARY: Require each campus of the California State University (CSU) and the California Community Colleges (CCC), and would request each campus of the University of California (UC), to include on the internet website-based account for an enrolled student, notification of, and a link to information on, specified public services and programs, including the CalFresh program, county or local housing resources, and county or local mental health services. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires each campus of the CSU and the CCC, and requests each campus of the UC, to include on the internet website-based student account associated with a student's attendance at the institution, notice of the following public services and programs:
 - a) The CalFresh program;
 - b) Resources, as determined by the institution to be most appropriate, for county or local housing services, which may also include, if determined to be appropriate for the geographic area where the institution is located, resources for legal assistance relating to housing; and,
 - c) Resources, as determined by the institution to be most appropriate, for county or local mental health services.
- 2) Requires each institution to include, immediately adjacent to the notices specified in subdivision (1) above, a link to the internet web page for each noticed program or resource.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Sets forth the missions and functions of the public institutions of higher education in the state, which includes the CCC, the CSU, and the UC. (Education Code (EDC) Section 66000, et seq.).
- 2) Requires the CSU Trustees, authorizes the governing board of a community college district, and encourages the Regents of the UC to designate as a "hunger free campus" each of their respective campuses that meets specified criteria, including the designation of an employee to help ensure that students have information relating to the CalFresh program. (EDC Section 66027.8)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: *Need for the bill.* According to the author, "AB 1278 seeks to address issues of housing and food insecurity and mental health that students at our colleges and universities are facing at alarming rates throughout California. Surveys suggest that more than one in five students had experienced hunger during the past month, and that close to one in 10 responded

they had been homeless at some point in the past year. There are a number of reasons why students may not be accessing the mental health, housing, and food security services currently available. Many students do not know that these services exist for them or that they might qualify for them. For many, the current processes for qualification can be burdensome and embarrassing. This bill would streamline the process for students to easily gain access to these services in a discreet and efficient manner.”

Food & housing insecurity among college students. A report was released in March of 2019 by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, in collaboration with the CCC Chancellor’s Office and The Institute for College Access and Success, titled the *California Community Colleges #RealCollege Survey*. This survey included nearly 40,000 students at 57 community colleges, and found that:

- 1) 19% of respondents experienced homelessness in the previous year.
- 2) 60% of respondents were housing insecure in the previous year.
- 3) 50% of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days.

Over half of survey respondents worried about running out of food or could not afford to eat balanced meals. Forty-one percent of respondents reported that they skipped meals or cut the size of their meals for financial reasons, and 12% of respondents reported not eating for at least one whole day during the prior month because they didn’t have enough money.

Additionally, the report noted that rates of basic needs insecurity are higher for marginalized students, including African Americans, students identifying as LGBTQ, and students considered independent from their parents or guardians for financial aid purposes. Students who have served in the military, former foster youth, and formerly incarcerated students are all at greater risk of basic needs insecurity. Working during college is not associated with a lower risk of basic needs insecurity, and neither is receiving the federal Pell Grant; the latter is associated with higher rates of basic needs insecurity.

Students who lack resources for housing often also lack resources for food. In addition, basic needs insecurity varies over time, such that a student might experience housing insecurity during one semester and food insecurity the next. Some students are housing insecure during the summer and homeless during the winter. Seven in 10 students responding to the survey experienced food insecurity or housing insecurity or homelessness during the previous year. In addition, 40% of respondents were both food and housing insecure in the past year, and 17% experienced both housing insecurity and homelessness during that time. Many of the latter group were also food insecure. Finally, 14% were both food insecure and homeless in the previous year.

The *Study of Student Basic Needs*, released by the CSU Office of the Chancellor in January 2018, identified and examined a number of barriers faced by students working to achieve postsecondary educational goals, which include housing and food insecurity. According to the study, 41.6% of CSU students reported food insecurity, and of those, 20% experienced low food security, while 21.6% experienced very low food security. Black/African-American students and first-generation attendees experienced the highest rates of food insecurity (65.9%) and homelessness (18%). Students who reported experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, or both,

also experienced mental health and physical consequences which correlated with lower academic achievement. These students also reported higher rates of “inactive days” where poor mental or physical health prevented them from engaging in normal day-to-day activities, such as school, work, self-care, and leisure activities. While CalFresh and campus emergency food pantry utilization was higher among students who reported low and very low food security when compared to their food secure peers, only 10.1% of students who reported very low food security and 7.5% of students who reported low food security used CalFresh benefits. The study also determined that 9.8% of students who reported low food security and 12.7% of students who reported very low food security utilized on campus food pantries.

CalFresh. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food access to low-income individuals who meet certain eligibility criteria; in California, this program is known as CalFresh. CalFresh benefits are entirely federally funded, and administration at the federal level lies with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA is tasked with setting specific eligibility requirements for SNAP programs across the country, as well as gross and net income tests, work requirements, and other documentation requirements. Currently, the maximum allowable gross income is 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), although households with elderly members or members with disabilities are not subject to gross income criteria, but must have a net monthly income at or below 100% of the FPL. In California, CalFresh is administered at the local level by county human services agencies, with federal, state, and county governments sharing the costs of program administration.

Nearly 4 million individuals in California receive CalFresh benefits; on average, an individual receives approximately \$135 per month in benefits. Individuals receive benefits on a monthly basis for food purchases through an EBT card, which is similar to an automated teller machine (ATM) card. Unlike an ATM card, however, CalFresh benefits cannot be withdrawn in cash at point-of-sale terminals or ATMs; instead, individuals may use benefits to purchase food items to be prepared and consumed at home.

Student mental health. The 2018 Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH) Annual Report, found that self-reported lifetime prevalence rates of “threat-to-self” characteristics (self-injury, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts) increased for the eighth year in a row, highlighting the important service that counseling centers serve in supporting students at risk and the broader national success in identifying and referring students who need help. Students reporting lifetime threat-to-self characteristics, when seeking treatment, use an average of 20 to 30% more services than students who do not, which further increases the strain on counseling centers as they seek to balance being responsive to new students in distress while also providing effective treatment for those who need it.

Additional findings in the 2018 CCMH Annual Report include:

- 1) Anxiety and depression (as reported by students and their counselors) continue to be the most common presenting concerns for college students, as identified by counseling center staff. Anxiety did not increase in prevalence for the first time in four years, whereas depression continued to increase in 2017-18.
- 2) Students’ average rates of self-reported anxiety and depression continue to increase while other areas of self-reported distress remain flat or decreasing.

- 3) Nearly 36% of students seeking treatment endorsed having experienced serious suicidal ideation in their lifetime but only 8.2% of students seeking treatment report serious suicidality in the last month. Clinicians identified suicidality as a current concern for just under 10% of students.
- 4) The prevalence rate of students who have received prior mental health treatment continue to remain largely flat over eight years. However, the rate of students who have received prior counseling has trended up over the last three years, with 54.4% of students seeking treatment indicating they have been in counseling before.

The 2018 CCMH Report describes 179,964 unique college students seeking mental health treatment; 3,723 clinicians; and more than 1.3 million appointments from the 2017-18 academic year.

Prior legislation. AB 1809 (Committee on Budget) Chapter 33, Statutes of 2018, required the CSU Trustees, authorized the governing board of a community college district, and encourages the Regents of the UC to designate as a “hunger free campus” each of their respective campuses that meets specified criteria, including the designation of an employee to help ensure that students have information relating to the CalFresh program.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file.

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Kevin J. Powers / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960