

# Assembly Bill 1961

## End Hunger in California Act

Assemblymember Buffy Wicks (AD-14)

### SUMMARY

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AB 1961 establishes a task force that, for the first time in state history, will develop a strategic master plan to end hunger in California. The task force will include food system stakeholders who will collaborate at the local, regional, and state levels and in partnership with tribal governments on ways to remove barriers to access adequate, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for all communities in California.

### BACKGROUND

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California is the fifth largest food supplier, producing nearly half of the nation's fruits and vegetables. However, more than 1 in 5 Californians, about 8.8 million people, currently struggle with food insecurity. Hunger and lack of access to nutritious food are exacerbated by racial and economic inequalities, with 40% of Black households and 30% of Latino households being food insecure in California.

Food deserts are regions in the country where at least one-third of the area's population is living more than a half-mile away from the closest supermarket or large grocery store and large proportions of households are low-income, have inadequate access to transportation, and a limited number of food retailers providing fresh produce and healthy groceries for affordable prices. In 2021, 65% of San Francisco and San Jose metro area neighborhoods were considered food deserts. In Fresno, over 20% of the residents live in food deserts. Food desert communities lack the resources to attract large grocery store chains, leaving residents with convenience stores and fast-food restaurants as their primary food sources.

Research shows that a lack of access to nutritious food can have disastrous consequences for children and adults. Children can be affected by hunger even

before they are born. Low prenatal iron levels have been linked to challenges with language comprehension and developmental delays and prevent children from being successful in the classroom. Childhood hunger is a predictor of depression in adolescence and young adulthood and may play a contributing role in mood, behavior, and substance abuse disorders. Furthermore, limited access to fresh and nutritious foods can lead to an increased reliance on processed and unhealthy options, which contributes to a higher prevalence of diet-related health issues such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

### SOLUTION

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AB 1961 requires the Strategic Growth Council to establish and convene the End Hunger in California masterplan taskforce to make recommendations for future comprehensive strategies to address access to healthy and culturally relevant food for all Californians.

The task force includes representatives from the Department of Public Health, Department of Education, Department of Food and Agriculture, Department of Social Services, Governor's Office of Economic Development, and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency. It also includes stakeholders representing workers in the food sector, nonprofits with expertise in regional food systems, anti-hunger organizations, farmers, grocers, local government, academics, and tribal representatives.

The task force will assist in the development of a master plan that will be distributed to the Legislature, providing maps of food deserts in California, identifying barriers for food retailers to locate in food deserts, strategies on how to increase participation and benefits received through Federal nutrition programs, recommendations for improving food access, analysis of state programs that invest in

our food systems, establish yearly goals to end hunger in California, and pinpoint funding sources to help locate retail establishments in food deserts, while identifying separate strategies to tackle food deserts in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal government areas.

The plan must be submitted to the Legislature no later than January 01, 2026.

## **SUPPORT**

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United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)  
Western States Council (Sponsor)  
California Food and Farming Network (Cosponsor)  
GRACE/End Child Poverty California (Cosponsor)

## **CONTACT**

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