



April 1, 2026

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel, Chair, Assembly Committee on Budget
The Honorable Dawn Addis, Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee 1
The Honorable John Laird, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
The Honorable Caroline Menjivar, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee 3

RE: CDPH Budget Change Proposal (4265-140-BCP-2026-GB)

Dear Chairs Gabriel, Addis, Laird, and Menjivar,

The Center for Science in the Public Interest is writing to express our strong support for the California Department of Public Health's Budget Change Proposal (4265-140-BCP-2026-GB), which requests funding to implement Assembly Bill 1264 (Gabriel - 2025).

AB 1264 is a first-of-its-kind law that enshrines a definition of ultra-processed food, or UPF, that integrates nutritional concerns and comprehensively captures chemical safety concerns. It then directs the California Department of Public Health to use that definition to further define "UPF of concern," which will be phased out of schools. The department's regulations identifying UPFs of concern will be guided by a rigorous examination of reputable, peer-reviewed scientific evidence.

There is growing concern about UPFs, the consumption of which has been linked to certain chronic diseases like cancer and cardiovascular disease. There is a clear need for nutrition and public health authorities to take action to protect consumers—and especially children—from the types of UPFs for which we have the strongest evidence of harm, like processed meats and sugar-sweetened beverages.^{1,2,3}

Prior to the enactment of AB 1264, California already led the nation in providing healthy, safe school meals to children thanks to its landmark school-meals-for-all policy;⁴ its mandate for school meals to align with the then-most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans on added sugar and sodium (which you signed into law in 2023);⁵ and its prohibition on the use of synthetic

¹ Cordova R, Viallon V, Fontvieille E, Peruchet-Noray L, Jansana A, Wagner KH, Kyrø C, Tjønneland A, Katzke V, Bajracharya R, Schulze MB, Masala G, Sieri S, Panico S, Ricceri F, Tumino R, Boer JMA, Verschuren WMM, van der Schouw YT, Jakszyn P, Redondo-Sánchez D, Amiano P, Huerta JM, Guevara M, Borné Y, Sonestedt E, Tsilidis KK, Millett C, Heath AK, Aglago EK, Aune D, Gunter MJ, Ferrari P, Huybrechts I, Freisling H. Consumption of ultra-processed foods and risk of multimorbidity of cancer and cardiometabolic diseases: a multinational cohort study. *Lancet Reg Health Eur*. 2023 Nov 14;35:100771.

² Mendoza K, Smith-Warner SA, Rossato SL, Khandpur N, Manson JE, Qi L, Rimm EB, Mukamal KJ, Willett WC, Wang M, Hu FB, Mattei J, Sun Q. Ultra-processed foods and cardiovascular disease: analysis of three large US prospective cohorts and a systematic review and meta-analysis of prospective cohort studies. *Lancet Reg Health Am*. 2024 Sep 2;37:100859.

³ Wang L, Steele EM, Du M, Luo H, Zhang X, Mozaffarian D, Zhang FF. Association Between Ultraprocessed Food Consumption and Mortality Among US Adults: Prospective Cohort Study of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2003-2008. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2024 Nov 26;S2212-2672(24)00991-2.

⁴ California Department of Education. California Universal Meals. Updated: April 24, 2025.

<http://cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/cauniversalmeals.asp>. Accessed: September 18, 2025.

⁵ California Senate Bill 348 Pupil Meals (2023-2024). Available:

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240SB348.



food dyes in school foods.⁶ AB 1264 further cements California as a leader among states in the rapidly growing movement to promote healthier diets and crack down on unsafe ingredients across the country.

Please approve the Department of Public Health's request for funds to identify UPFs of concern and provide California's schools technical assistance to implement AB 1264.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Galligan, PhD
Principal Scientist for Food Additives and Supplements
Center for Science in the Public Interest

⁶ California Assembly Bill 2316 Pupil Nutrition (2023-2024). Available: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB2316.