

Per California Code of Regulations, title 2, section 548.5, the following information will be posted to CalHR's Career Executive Assignment Action Proposals website for 30 calendar days when departments propose new CEA concepts or major revisions to existing CEA concepts. Presence of the department-submitted CEA Action Proposal information on CalHR's website does not indicate CalHR support for the proposal.

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Date

09/28/2026

2. Department

Department of Social Services

3. Organizational Placement (Division/Branch/Office Name)

Executive Division

4. CEA Position Title

Special Advisor to Chief Deputy Director

5. Summary of proposed position description and how it relates to the program's mission or purpose. (2-3 sentences)

The Special Advisor serves as a primary advisor to the Chief Deputy Director (CDD) of the California Department of Social Services and is responsible for advancing the Department's highest priority crosscutting initiatives with statewide impact. These initiatives directly impact vulnerable Californian's access to benefits and services, and as such are essential to furthering the Department's mission to serve, protect, and support the people of California experiencing need in ways that empower wellbeing and disrupt systemic inequities.

6. Reports to: (Class Title/Level)

Chief Deputy Director / Exempt

7. Relationship with Department Director (*Select one*)

- ☒ Member of department's Executive Management Team, and has frequent contact with director on a wide range of department-wide issues.
- ☐ Not a member of department's Executive Management Team but has frequent contact with the Executive Management Team on policy issues.

(*Explain*):

8. Organizational Level (*Select one*)

- ☐ 1st ☐ 2nd ☒ 3rd ☐ 4th ☐ 5th (mega departments only - 17,001+ allocated positions)

B. SUMMARY OF REQUEST

9. What are the duties and responsibilities of the CEA position? Be specific and provide examples.

Strategic Leadership and Initiative Execution:

The Special Advisor will develop, interpret, implement, monitor and evaluate policies, procedures, legislation and federal mandates that have cross departmental impact to ensure consistency with existing departmental policies and objectives in furtherance of the Department's mission. A recent applicable example is the Department's implementation of federal House of Representatives 1 (HR 1) an Act to provide for reconciliation pursuant to title II of H. Con. Res. 14. which impacts several divisions across the Department, multiple departments within multiple state agencies, and Californians with low-income statewide (the impact of HR 1 is described in more detail in response #23). In this area of responsibility, the Special Advisor will also review, formulate, and implement departmental policy for high level projects that have broad impact, across multiple programmatic areas, make program and policy recommendations that have department-wide impact in a wide variety of areas, such as organizational structure and program enhancements necessary to ensure adherence with the vision and mission of the Department, and provide guidance to multifaceted programs regarding a variety of public policy issues, court mandates, and cross-programmatic policies which are critical to the daily operation of the Department. Finally, the Special Advisor will develop strategic approaches to assess program effectiveness to ensure continuous improvement and successful program outcomes.

Engagement and Communication:

The Special Advisor will ensure the Department's mission and priorities are reflected in executive projects and initiatives, represent the CDD and serve as a liaison with executive management, the California Health & Human Services Agency(CalHHSA), the Department of Finance, the Legislature, and the Governor's Office and build and maintain relationships on behalf of the CDD with stakeholders, community-based organizations, client advocates, the 58 county health and human services agencies, and other partners to support the successful implementation of departmental initiatives. The Special Advisor will work collaboratively with executive management in the development, coordination, and implementation of departmental and programmatic policies, coordinate study efforts to identify policy needs across the Department and advance the Department's mission and objectives, and develop clear, strategic departmental communications for internal and external stakeholders on initiative progress and outcomes. For example, to achieve this the Special Advisor may facilitate highly-sensitive meetings, working groups, and engagement sessions with a range of partners and produce public deliverables on behalf of the Department with a high-level of autonomy.

Coordination and Systems Integration:

The Special Advisor will serve as a primary liaison for enterprise-wide initiatives with statewide impact across Divisions, Departments, control agencies and external partners, advance alignment across human services, workforce, and related systems by breaking down silos, and support governance structures to promote accountability and track progress. For example, the Special Advisor may be tasked with establishing an initiative management approach, including a governance and decision making structure that includes multiple teams within the Department, and requires coordination with the other Departments and CalHHSA.

Performance Management and Accountability:

The Special Advisor will establish metrics, dashboards, and reporting frameworks to track progress and use data and evaluation to drive continuous improvement, prepare executive briefings, reports and presentations. For example, the Special Advisor may establish regular reporting structures on initiative progress, including progress made across team's within the Division, and synthesize information to assess opportunities, barriers and risk as well as recommendations for future action.

Organizational Leadership:

The Special Advisor will lead, mentor and develop multidisciplinary teams, foster a culture of collaboration, innovation and accountability, and manage resources, contracts and budgets associated with initiatives. As an example, the Special Advisor may facilitate, on behalf of the Chief Deputy, an internal governance structure to coordinate multiple simultaneous efforts under the umbrella of a single initiative.

B. SUMMARY OF REQUEST (continued)

10. How critical is the program's mission or purpose to the department's mission as a whole? Include a description of the degree to which the program is critical to the department's mission.

- ☒ Program is directly related to department's primary mission and is critical to achieving the department's goals.
- ☐ Program is indirectly related to department's primary mission.
- ☐ Program plays a supporting role in achieving department's mission (i.e., budget, personnel, other admin functions).

Description: The Special Advisor is responsible for advancing the Department's highest priority crosscutting initiatives with statewide impact. The Special Advisor is the "connective tissue" that binds executive vision to programmatic execution. While the specific initiatives may vary over time, they reflect the Department's most consequential priorities with the potential to directly impact vulnerable Californian's access to benefits and services, as well as the state's ability to maintain compliance with federal requirements which in turn impacts funding in the range of tens of billions of dollars per year. As such, successful implementation of these initiatives, with a high degree of autonomy and the ability to represent the Department on behalf of the Administration, are essential to furthering the Department's mission to serve, protect, and support the people of California experiencing need in ways that empower wellbeing and disrupt systemic inequities. Without the strategic leadership and integration functions of the Special Advisor the Department's primary mission would be fragmented, inefficient, and at risk of non-compliance with federal and state mandates.

B. SUMMARY OF REQUEST (continued)

11. Describe what has changed that makes this request necessary. Explain how the change justifies the current request. Be specific and provide examples.

California is managing unprecedented federal volatility directly impacting programs administered by the Department including simultaneous rule changes across programs, significant cost shifts to the state, threats of increased oversight and fiscal penalties, and more. The Chief Deputy Director cannot personally oversee the Department's response. The Special Advisor will provide the strategic leadership needed to interpret these mandates into action and ensure that the Department's vision remains consistent in this changing landscape.

The enactment of HR 1 represents the most significant structural change to social safety net programs in recent history. H.R. 1 refers to major federal legislation in the United States House of Representatives, most notably the sweeping budget reconciliation law signed by President Trump on July 4, 2025, officially titled the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. HR 1 introduces several significant and long term challenges to ensuring vulnerable Californians across the state have access to benefits and services, and that California's 58 county health and human services agencies who administer the program locally have what they need to do their work effectively. Most significantly, HR 1 impacts the state's administration of CalFresh, California's version of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, and Medi-Cal, California's version of Medicaid. HR 1 dramatically changes CalFresh rules by eliminating eligibility for most humanitarian noncitizens and implementing a limit on the duration which an individual can receive benefits without meeting the corresponding work rules for more people and much sooner than prior to the passage of HR 1. The changes, alone with others, will result in hundreds of thousands of less people receiving CalFresh. HR 1 also dramatically changes the availability of federal funding for the administration of CalFresh and, for the first time, introduces benefit cost sharing by states for the benefits themselves. Historically, the federal government covered 50% of the administrative costs for CalFresh. Under new mandates, this reimbursement is projected to drop to 25% by October 2026, representing a loss of nearly \$700M and requiring California to absorb these additional costs. Further, under new mandates, states could be responsible for up to 15% of all benefits issued, which in California could total up to nearly \$2 billion per year, unless they bring their CalFresh Payment Error Rate below 6%.

The Special Advisor, on behalf of the Chief Deputy Director, will identify efficiencies that can offset these massive funding gaps without sacrificing service delivery. The Special Advisor must lead the coordination and systems integration efforts to ensure state and county systems are aligned to prevent loss of benefits, to the extent possible.

C. ROLE IN POLICY INFLUENCE

12. Provide 3-5 specific examples of policy areas over which the CEA position will be the principle policy maker. Each example should cite a policy that would have an identifiable impact. Include a description of the statewide impact of the assigned program.

The Special Advisor functions as the principal policymaker for initiatives that impact more than one Division within the Department, as well as multiple Departments across multiple state Agencies serving people who receive CalFresh in addition to other essential services like Medi-Cal. The Special Advisor doesn't just manage a project or program; it creates the policy and operational architecture for how the Department serves millions of residents effectively in light of a changing administrative environment. Below are specific examples of policy areas where this position will hold decision-making authority:

CalFresh Accuracy Improvement Initiatives:

As a result of HR 1, the federal government is introducing new CalFresh benefit cost sharing beginning as early as Federal Fiscal Year 2028. For the first time in the program's history, the state will be responsible for a share of CalFresh benefits up to 15% based on the state's Payment Error Rate (PER) relative to a 6% threshold. California's share could be nearly \$2 billion unless the state is able to improve accuracy and reduce its PER to below 6% to avoid a benefit cost share. Preventing this new fiscal pressure requires a significant reduction in the state's PER, which has trended with the national average for years. To achieve this, the state must execute on a multi-year, multi-faceted accuracy improvement initiative that involves the work of multiple teams within the Department, the state's 58 county human services agencies, the state's eligibility system, multiple Departments within and outside CalHHS, and more. This work requires a clear and cohesive strategy that reflects the reality of the state's complex and large scale policy and operational environment. It requires extensive engagement with various leadership levels within the administration, and with partners internal and external to government. If not addressed effectively and expeditiously, these new costs pose a significant risk to the state's ability to maintain access to benefits and services for the state's most vulnerable residents.

Service Delivery Improvement Initiatives:

Many of California's safety net services, including CalFresh and CalWORKs are delivered by California's 58 county health and human service agencies. While each county delivers in-person services via a network of their own office locations, the state recently transitioned to a single statewide eligibility system presenting the opportunity to streamline service delivery across the state, improving both the eligibility worker and recipient experience and ensuring that access is a priority in this complex policy and operational environment. This eligibility system is county-administered, but the Department plays a key role in setting policy that drives automation and influences the design of automation. More and more, the policy set by the Department impacts the eligibility worker back-end and the self-service tools available to Californians. With effective executive level leadership, there is an opportunity to develop a more cohesive approach to this work that aligns with the Department's vision for serving Californians statewide, integrates improved service delivery as a priority across program areas, and is driven by data and client outcomes. If not addressed effectively and expeditiously, the state risks a missed opportunity to improve the client experience, while streamlining the administration of multiple safety net programs. This not only impacts California's most vulnerable residents directly, but also the state's significant annual fiscal investment in the administration of these programs.

Collaborative Cross Department Initiatives:

California's health and human services landscape is complex, with a wide range of state and federal programs administered across multiple Departments. The complexity is increased when other services, such as education and workforce, are considered in this landscape. To maximize impact, collaboration and alignment is necessary. Dedicated effort at the executive level is required to make this happen effectively and in alignment with the administration's goal of a California for All. This work requires relationship building, a deep understanding of the interconnectedness between programs and the needs they address, as well as a strategic vision to achieve outcomes agnostic to the bureaucratic complexities of the state. If intentional effort is not made to support the level of collaboration necessary to achieve shared goals, the risk is a disjointed array of benefits and services at the local level. This is not only inefficient from an administrative perspective, but does not meet Californians' holistic needs.

C. ROLE IN POLICY INFLUENCE (continued)

13. What is the CEA position's scope and nature of decision-making authority?

The Special Advisor will possess independent, enterprise-wide policymaking authority and serve as a direct advisor to top-level administrative leadership on high-risk, cross-departmental initiatives. Operating with a high degree of autonomy and independent judgment, the position is responsible for interpreting and formulating long-term departmental policies to navigate complex federal mandates like H.R. 1, while actively representing the Department and establishing unified approach with CalHHS, the Department of Finance, the Legislature, the Governor's Office, and all 58 county health and human services agencies. Rather than managing transactional operations, the nature of this role's authority is highly strategic and conceptual—holding principal decision-making power over statewide eligibility frameworks, resource allocation, and performance metrics to mitigate substantial fiscal penalties and ensure continuous, compliant service delivery to millions of low-income Californians.

14. Will the CEA position be developing and implementing new policy, or interpreting and implementing existing policy? How?

This will vary over time depending, for example, on the actions of the State Legislature and federal government. The CEA will do this in collaboration with other leaders within and outside the Department, as well as based on extensive input from partners including the counties, the Legislature, advocates for eligible Californians and more.