

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 2299 (Calderon)
As Amended April 6, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Renames and revises the California Food Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants (CFAP) by removing outdated federal eligibility references, extending eligibility to individuals ineligible for CalFresh due to able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) time limits or humanitarian immigration status. Requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide state-funded benefits to those populations and revises benefit calculations.

Major Provisions

- 1) Creates the California Antihunger Response and Employment Training Act of 2026.
- 2) Renames the California Food Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants to the California Food Assistance Program.
- 3) Strikes references to Public Law 104-193 and any subsequent amendments thereto relating to CFAP eligibility for noncitizens of the United States (U.S.) whose immigration status meets the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility criteria in effect on August 21, 1996, but who are ineligible for federal SNAP benefits solely due to immigration status.
- 4) Expands CFAP eligibility to include individuals ineligible for CalFresh benefits solely due to the federal time limits placed on ABAWDs, regardless of whether they are a citizen or noncitizen, and humanitarian immigration status.
- 5) Adds to CDSS' requirement relating to using state CFAP funds to provide nutrition benefits to households to include those that are ineligible for CalFresh benefits solely due to the federal ABAWD time limit, regardless of citizenship status, and humanitarian immigration status.
- 6) Clarifies that the benefit amount of a CFAP recipient who is an excluded member of a CalFresh household shall be limited to the amount that the recipient would have received as their share of a CalFresh household benefit, had they not been excluded due to their humanitarian status or expired federal time limit.
- 7) Strikes the requirement that CFAP be implemented only during any period that federal benefits are provided.

COMMENTS

Background: *CalFresh*, California's implementation of the federal SNAP, is the state's largest food assistance program and primary lifeline for residents struggling with food insecurity. Administered by CDSS and county human services agencies, CalFresh provides monthly food benefits via an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card that can be used to purchase eligible food such as fruits and vegetables, meat, dairy products, and seeds at authorized retailers, including grocery stores and farmers' markets.

In 2024-25, about 5.5 million Californians received over \$12.5 billion in federally funded CalFresh benefits, with an average monthly benefit of about \$192 per person, or \$6.46 per day. Research shows SNAP reduces food insecurity by about 20% overall and by 33% among children. The Public Policy Institute of California estimates CalFresh kept approximately 856,000 Californians out of poverty in 2023, including 312,000 children,¹ making it the state's largest poverty-reduction program.

CalFresh/SNAP Changes in H.R. 1: ABAWD Time Limits. On July 4, 2025, H.R. 1 was signed into law and made significant changes to ABAWD time-limit rules by expanding the age range subject to the time limit, narrowing exemption criteria, and limiting state and county waiver eligibility. These changes take effect June 1, 2026, and are expected to increase the number of individuals subject to the time limit and at risk of losing CalFresh benefits unless they qualify for an exemption or meet work requirements.

Under CalFresh rules, ABAWDs are generally limited to three months of benefits within a 36-month period unless they qualify for an exemption, meet work requirements, live in an area with a time-limit waiver, qualify for an additional three-month eligibility period, or receive a discretionary exemption. According to All County Letter (ACL) 25-93,² federal law previously defined ABAWDs as individuals 18 through 49 years of age without dependents who did not qualify for an exemption. The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 increased the upper age limit to 54 years of age, and H.R. 1 further increased the upper age limit to 64 years of age. Individuals 60 through 64 years of age remain exempt from general work requirements due to age but may still be subject to the ABAWD time limit unless they qualify for another exemption. Individuals are no longer considered ABAWDs beginning the month they turn 65 years of age.

H.R. 1 also made significant changes to ABAWD exemptions by eliminating temporary exemptions for veterans, individuals experiencing homelessness, and former foster youth under 25 years of age. H.R. 1 modified the dependent child exemption by limiting it to individuals responsible for the care of a dependent child under 14 years of age, rather than individuals living with a child under 18 years of age.

CDSS estimates that the expanded ABAWD definition will increase the affected population from about 345,400 to 954,800 individuals, with approximately 665,500 individuals expected to be subject to the time limit and potentially lose CalFresh eligibility, including 250,000 individuals who have been identified as homeless. The remaining 289,000 individuals are expected to either meet work requirements or qualify for an exemption. CDSS expects these discontinuances to occur gradually over 12 months during annual recertifications.

On April 7, 2026, the Department of Finance approved \$20 million GF to provide counties one-time funding to support administrative readiness efforts for the June 1, 2026, implementation of H.R. 1 ABAWD provisions.

This bill expands CFAP to provide state-funded food benefits to individuals who lose CalFresh eligibility solely due to the federal ABAWD time limit, which includes populations previously

¹ <https://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/>

² <https://cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACLs/2025/25-93.pdf?ver=Ib9riEMEV474i6-xtntg4g%3d%3d>

exempt from the ABAWD time limits such as veterans, individuals experiencing homelessness, and former foster youth under 25 years of age.

California Food Assistance Program. California provides state-funded food benefits through the CFAP program for individuals in limited categories of legal immigrant status (meaning refugees and victims of domestic violence) who are not eligible for federal CalFresh benefits due solely to their immigration status. CFAP benefits are equivalent to those provided by CalFresh. In the 2024-25 fiscal year, CFAP benefits totaled approximately \$130 million for 28,900 households. Under the Budget Act of 2024, the state plans to expand CFAP eligibility to include all adults 55 years of age and older, regardless of immigration status, starting in 2027.

CalFresh/SNAP Changes in H.R. 1: Noncitizen Eligibility. According to ACL 25-92,³ H.R. 1 did not change the definition of "qualified aliens" under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act but amended the Food and Nutrition Act to significantly narrow noncitizen eligibility for SNAP. Under H.R. 1, SNAP eligibility is limited to U.S. citizens, noncitizen U.S. nationals, LPRs, individuals residing in the U.S. under a Compact of Free Association, and Cuban and Haitian entrants.

Effective April 1, 2026, several categories of lawfully present noncitizens who are not LPRs are no longer eligible, including refugees, asylees, parolees (unless they are Cuban and Haitian entrants), individuals with deportation or removal withheld, conditional entrants, trafficking survivors, battered noncitizens, and certain Afghan and Ukrainian parolees. These individuals may become eligible for CalFresh or CFAP if they adjust to LPR status and meet or are exempt from the five-year waiting period. The PPIC reports that 80% of immigrants were either citizens or had some other legal residency status in 2023, down from 83% in 2022.

This bill expands CFAP to provide state-funded food benefits to individuals who are ineligible for CalFresh solely due to their humanitarian immigration status.

According to the Author

"As our version of the federal SNAP program, CalFresh has helped millions of Californians afford groceries for their families. However, with the signing of H.R. 1 President Trump drastically cut federal funding to SNAP and CalFresh. Specifically, H.R. 1 initiates stricter work requirements, removes eligibility for certain lawfully present immigrants, and shifts billions of dollars in program costs from the federal government onto states. If we do not act as a state, nearly a million Californians will lose access to CALFRESH, that helps put food on the table."

Arguments in Support

According to the Sponsors of this bill, GRACE End Child Poverty CA, Public Interest Law Project, California Association of Food Banks, Western Center on Law & Poverty, and the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organization write, "California's food system economy is one of our most important. When people are cut off from food assistance, the amount of money they'll have to spend in California grocery stores will be reduced, harming our state's economy. We saw this not too long ago with the CalFresh delay during the 2025 government shutdown. Not only will gross sales decline in one of our most important industries, but the workers in that industry will face increased job insecurity. Additionally, many of these workers may themselves

³ <https://cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACLs/2025/25-92.pdf?ver=PRtQKSFGm1objM-ai4SirA%3d%3d>

be cut off from benefits, as many food retailer workers also get SNAP. [This bill] will prevent hunger, promote employment, and support California's food economy."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee on May 6, 2026:

- 1) Ongoing General Fund (GF) costs of at least \$1 billion annually to expand CFAP to provide benefits to approximately 660,000 persons discontinued from CalFresh benefits as a result of federal limitations. This estimate assumes approximately 840,000 individuals will become subject to the work requirement beginning June 1, 2026. Of these individuals, approximately 660,000 will not meet the work requirement or qualify for an allowable exemption, meaning they are likely to lose access to CalFresh benefits three months after they are screened. CDSS estimates in 2026-27, the average monthly benefit per discontinued time-limited individual is \$260.45 and that approximately 108,600 individuals will lose benefits each month.
- 2) Ongoing GF costs of approximately \$190,000 to \$200,000 to expand CFAP to include approximately 72,000 noncitizens discontinued from CalFresh under federal House Resolution 1 (H.R.1) (Public Law 119-21).
- 3) CDSS estimates ongoing GF administrative costs of an unknown amount, likely in the range of \$800,000 to \$1.3 million, to support five to eight staff positions to implement the changes in the bill.
- 4) One-time GF automation costs of an unknown amount for changes to the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS).
- 5) Ongoing costs counties to administer expanded CFAP benefits. In April, the Department of Finance approved \$20 million to provide counties one-time funding to support administrative implementation of H.R.1 ABAWD provisions.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

VOTES

ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 5-0-2

YES: Lee, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Castillo, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4

YES: Wicks, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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