

Date of Hearing: April 23, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

AB 2765 (Ahrens) – As Amended April 13, 2026

**SUBJECT:** CalFresh and CalWORKs: childhood hunger and foster youth

**SUMMARY:** Revises and expands the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) recurring special needs allowance by increasing the maximum monthly amount from \$10 to \$15 per eligible recipient. Authorizes the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to extend the allowance to CalWORKs-eligible households who are receiving aid under other provisions of the Welfare and Institutions Code to mitigate harm from federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) cuts and authorizes the recurring special needs allowance to be provided in the form of an equivalent food benefit. Requires CDSS to seek a federal waiver from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to exempt foster youth and former foster youth from any cuts to their SNAP benefits as a result of the federal able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) time limit. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Revises the recurring special needs allowance, which include, but are not limited to, special diets prescribed by a physician for non-pregnancy-related conditions and unusual costs for transportation, laundry, housekeeping services, telephone and utilities, to be provided in addition to CalWORKs aid to each needy family, by increasing the maximum monthly amount from \$10 to \$15 per eligible recipient multiplied by the number of recipients in the family who are eligible for assistance.
- 2) Authorizes, subject to CDSS' discretion to establish a mechanism implementing this provision, a household that receives aid under any provision of the Welfare and Institutions Code and that is also eligible for CalWORKs aid, regardless of whether the household receives CalWORKs aid, to receive a recurring special needs allowance in order to prevent immediate child suffering and long-term harm caused by prolonged periods of childhood hunger or other unmet needs that will result from federal House Resolution 1 (H.R. 1; Public Law 119-21), signed by United States (U.S.) President Donald J. Trump on July 4, 2025, if unmitigated.
- 3) Authorizes, subject to CDSS' discretion to establish a mechanism implementing this provision, the recurring special needs allowance to be provided instead in the form of a food benefit that is equivalent in value to the special needs allowance.
- 4) Defines, for purposes of these provisions, "ABAWD participant" to include a parent or other member of a household with responsibility for a dependent child 14 years of age or older as a result of federal H.R. 1, signed by U.S. President Donald J. Trump on July 4, 2025.
- 5) Requires CDSS to seek a waiver from the USDA to protect the most vulnerable foster youth from experiencing hunger as a result of the cuts to their assistance resulting from federal H.R. 1, signed by U.S. President Donald J. Trump on July 4, 2025. Requires the waiver to request that foster youth and former foster youth 24 years of age or younger who were in foster care on the date of attaining 18 years of age or an older age be exempted from any cuts to their SNAP benefits as a result of the new SNAP time limit for this population as set forth in Public Law 119-21.

- 6) Requires CDSS to issue an all-county letter to implement the waiver within three months after receiving approval for the submitted waiver and, to the extent allowable under federal law and guidance or a waiver thereof, to instruct counties of steps that they may take to maximize the ability of foster youth participating in any of the following programs to be automatically deemed exempt from, or in compliance with, the ABAWD time limit described in state law:
  - a) Transitional Independent Living Plan;
  - b) Guardian Scholars Program;
  - c) Foster Youth Success Initiative;
  - d) Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Educational Support, also known as NextUp;
  - e) Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program; and,
  - f) Extended Foster Care.
- 7) Provides that no appropriation shall be made for purposes of these provisions.
- 8) Makes the following findings and declarations:
  - a) Federal H.R. 1, known as the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” which was passed on a partisan vote with all but two Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives and three Republicans in the U.S. Senate voting “Yea” and all Democrats voting “Nay,” made the largest cuts to SNAP, known as CalFresh in California, in history;
  - b) H.R. 1 made these cuts to help fund the largest tax cuts for wealthy corporations and individuals in history;
  - c) These cuts are currently being enacted during a period of significant food inflation, caused in part by raids by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement on immigrant farmworkers and trade tariffs levied unilaterally by President Donald J. Trump;
  - d) Among these cuts were cuts to food assistance for foster youth and families with children;
  - e) According to H.R. 1, the cuts to foster youth and families with dependent children are generally applied if the household fails to show proof of adequate work for adults in the household between 18 and 64 years of age, inclusive, despite the fact that there is no evidence that people are more able to find and keep work if they are experiencing hunger or their children are experiencing hunger;
  - f) The Legislature refuses to comply with the deception of H.R. 1, which dishonestly designated these new benefit cuts to families with children to be implemented under the “ABAWD” policy. The Legislature therefore plans to amend state law to accurately account for the harm caused to families with children as a result of the new federal law;
  - g) The Legislature declares that no one should experience hunger, especially not children and not foster youth transitioning to adulthood;

- h) The Legislature recognizes the significant and long-term harm that can be caused by hunger experienced by children and young adults, especially those who experienced other traumas as a child, such as those known to have been experienced by foster youth; and,
  - i) The Legislature encourages all efforts to reduce the number of children and foster youth harmed by this cruel new federal policy.
- 9) Makes conforming changes.

**EXISTING LAW:**

## State law:

- 1) Establishes access to sufficient, affordable, and healthy food as a human right and requires state agencies and departments to consider this state policy when it is pertinent to the distribution of sufficient, affordable food. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 18700)
- 2) Establishes the CalFresh program to administer the provision of federal SNAP benefits to families and individuals meeting certain criteria, as specified. (WIC § 18900 *et seq.*)
- 3) Establishes the CalWORKs program to provide cash assistance and other social services for low-income families through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under CalWORKs, each county provides assistance through a combination of state, county and federal TANF funds. (WIC § 11200 *et seq.*)
- 4) Establishes that a needy family be entitled to receive an allowance for recurring special needs not common to a majority of recipients, as specified. Provides that the special needs allowance for each family per month shall not exceed that amount from multiplying the sum of \$10 by the number of recipients in the family who are eligible for assistance. (WIC § 11450(e))
- 5) Requires CDSS, to the extent permitted by federal law, to annually seek a federal waiver of the existing federal SNAP limitation that stipulates that an ABAWD participant is limited to three months of CalFresh benefits in a three-year period unless that participant has met the work participation requirement or is otherwise exempt. (WIC § 18926(a))
- 6) Establishes the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Act and defines the EBT system as the program designed to provide benefits to those eligible to receive public assistance benefits such as CalWORKs and CalFresh. (WIC § 10065 *et seq.*)

## Federal law:

- 7) Establishes SNAP pursuant to the Food Stamp Act of 1964. (7 United States Code [U.S.C.] § 2011 *et seq.*)
- 8) Amends SNAP through the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 by expanding work requirements, restricting eligibility for certain noncitizens, and shifting a portion of benefit and administrative costs to states, among other things. (7 U.S.C. § 2011 *et seq.*; Public Law 119-21)

- 9) Establishes the federal TANF program, which provides block grants to states to develop and implement their own state welfare-to-work programs designed to provide cash assistance and other supports and services to low-income families. (42 U.S.C. § 601 *et seq.*)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown, this bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

**COMMENTS:**

**Background:** *CalWORKs* is the state's primary cash assistance program. More specifically, *CalWORKs* implements the federal TANF program, which is a federal flexible block grant with the objective of providing income and support to families with children. *CalWORKs* provides eligible low-income families with cash grants through an EBT card, education, employment and training programs, and supportive services to give families opportunities to build resilience and achieve critical economic mobility.

In fiscal year 2024-25, 358,942 families received assistance, and the Administration projects a 1.3% increase to 363,766 families. As of October 2025, the maximum monthly grant for a family of three on *CalWORKs* (one parent and two children), if the family has no other income and lives in a high-cost-of-living county, is \$1,175, which is 53% of the 2025 federal poverty level. The average grant amount in fiscal year 2025-26 was \$999.

Current law authorizes additional assistance for *CalWORKs* families that incur necessary costs not common to the majority of recipients, such as unusual transportation or laundry expenses. Specifically, a monthly allowance of up to \$10 per eligible household member may be provided to address recurring special needs. These allowances may also cover costs associated with therapeutic diets, excluding pregnancy-related needs, when recommended by a physician. Approval of any special need is contingent on verification of the expense, its necessity, and its duration, and must be reassessed at regular reporting intervals.

*This bill* increases the maximum recurring special needs allowance from \$10 to \$15 per eligible household member and authorizes, subject to CDSS' implementation, the provision of this allowance to certain households eligible for *CalWORKs*, even if not currently receiving aid, to address unmet needs associated with federal changes enacted under H.R. 1 (Public Law 119-21).

*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 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.

Eligibility is primarily based on household income, assets, and household composition. Households may be categorically eligible if they receive or are eligible for programs such as *CalWORKs*, General Assistance/General Relief, Social Security Income/State Supplementary Payment, Cash Assistance for Immigrants, or Tribal TANF. Because *CalFresh* is largely governed by federal law, the state has limited authority to modify eligibility rules.

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,<sup>1</sup> making it the state's largest poverty-reduction program.

*This bill* authorizes the CalWORKs recurring special needs allowance to be provided as a food benefit of equivalent value.

*CalFresh/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Changes in H.R. 1: Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents 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, which is an average of 20 hours per week or 80 hours per month, live in an area with a time-limit waiver, qualify for an additional three-month eligibility period, or receive a discretionary exemption. While H.R. 1 does not change the overall structure of the ABAWD time-limit policy, it significantly changes who is subject to the time limit and who qualifies for exemptions.

According to All County Letter (ACL) 25-93,<sup>2</sup> 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 adding a new exemption for individuals who meet the definition of Indian, Urban Indian, or California Indian under federal law and 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.

Research shows that when time limits are imposed, program participation drops significantly, largely because individuals are cut off from assistance rather than because they obtain employment.<sup>3</sup> Studies also show time limits do not significantly increase employment or earnings, and most individuals subject to time limits already work at some point before or after

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

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

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/worsening-snaps-harsh-work-requirement-would-take-food-assistance->

[away#:~:text=SNAP's%20Harsh%20Work%20Requirement%20Takes,that%20year%2C%20Census%20data%20show.&text=Work%20rates%20among%20SNAP%20households,at%20some%20point%20during%202023.](https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance-)

receiving food assistance, often in low-wage jobs with unstable hours. When food benefits are cut off, individuals often struggle to afford food, housing, and healthcare, increasing hardship without improving employment outcomes.

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.

CDSS estimates the net administrative cost to implement ABAWD changes in 2025-26 at \$2.7 million General Fund (GF; \$7.5 million total funds), which was included in the June 2025 Budget prior to the enactment of H.R. 1. While no new additional funding has been provided in the current fiscal year or proposed in the Governor's 2026-27 Budget to implement the changes or address the projected CalFresh caseload reductions, the budget authorized up to \$35 million General Fund for implementation, including up to \$15 million for CDSS, and up to \$20 million to support county implementation. 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* defines ABAWD participants to reflect federal changes affecting parents of children 14 years of age or older and requires CDSS to seek a federal waiver to protect foster youth and former foster youth from SNAP time limit impacts. *This bill* also requires CDSS to issue guidance to counties on maximizing exemptions for foster youth participating in specified education and support programs.

**Author's Statement:** According to the Author, "This bill addresses the cuts to critical benefits for food security across the State of California. Just because families have children over the age of 14, or are a part of vulnerable groups such as veterans, foster youth or are experiencing homelessness does not mean that they should have to worry about where or how they are going to fund their next meal after three-months.

"The waiver of the three-month, so-called "Able Bodied Adult Without Dependent" time requirement threatens the food safety benefits of approximately 610,000 CalFresh beneficiaries as they will soon be subject to work requirements for their benefits, even though 115,000 of these individuals currently work 20 hours or more hours per week, the other 495,000 are subjected to discontinuance of benefits when these changes come into effect on July 1st, 2026. During this period of significant food inflation, these cuts to food benefits threaten the fabric of our social safety nets and, without a doubt, will increase the number of children in our state experiencing the indignity of hunger.

"As someone who has experienced what it feels like to worry about where your next meal comes from, I am asking my colleagues in the Legislature to remember that we have an obligation to protect the children in our state. While there are many ways that our capacity to do so is limited, this is not the case when it comes to hunger. We can and have reduced child hunger in our state. We can't let HR 1 undo that progress and we must make sure as few individuals and families as possible go hungry in our Golden State."

**Equity Implications:** *This bill* seeks to mitigate the disproportionate impacts of recent federal SNAP reductions under H.R. 1 on low-income households, particularly those already facing barriers to meeting basic needs. By increasing the recurring special needs allowance and extending eligibility to specified households that may not currently receive CalWORKs, *this bill* is intended to provide additional support to families experiencing food insecurity, including those with children, and households with elevated costs due to medical or environmental conditions.

*This bill* also includes targeted protections for foster youth by requiring CDSS to seek a federal waiver to exempt current and former foster youth from new SNAP time limits. Given the heightened risk of housing instability, unemployment, and food insecurity among this population, *this bill* may help prevent abrupt loss of food assistance during a critical transition to adulthood.

**Arguments in Support:** According to SEIU, co-sponsor of the bill, “This bill seeks to address the impact of the federal social safety net benefit cuts that were caused by H.R. 1, making the largest-in-history cuts to the SNAP, known as CalFresh in California.

“SEIU workers are the public employees who determine CalFresh and CalWORKs eligibility, helping low-income California residents access essential food and cash assistance, including nearly half a million families with children. [This bill] will impact our workforce by reducing hunger among those affected by changes in SNAP eligibility as a result of H.R. 1.

Specifically, [this bill] will provide hunger relief to children 14–18 years of age and foster youth, and it will increase the allowance amount a CalWORKs-eligible family is able to receive for recurring special needs to prevent immediate child suffering and long-term harm caused by prolonged periods of childhood hunger or other unmet needs, if unmitigated.”

**Arguments in Opposition:** None on file.

#### **RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:**

***AB 2299 (Calderon) of the current legislative session***, renames and revises the California Food Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants by removing outdated federal eligibility references, extending eligibility to individuals ineligible for CalFresh due to ABAWD time limits or humanitarian immigration status. Requires the CDSS to provide state-funded benefits to those populations and revises benefit calculations. *AB 2299 is pending before the Assembly Appropriations Committee.*

***AB 1211 (Sharp-Collins) of 2025***, would have required CDSS, if the federal government reduced SNAP benefits, to ensure that CalFresh benefits remain at current levels, and to use state funds if federal funding is insufficient. Would have required CDSS to conduct a feasibility study on increasing eligibility and benefits of the CalFresh program. *AB 1211 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

***AB 987 (R. Rivas) of 2019***, would have adopted a lack of access to potable water and a child recipient having an elevated blood lead level recurring special needs allowance and would have required the special diet benefit to be provided as a supplemental food benefit, among other things. *AB 987 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

*SB 904 (Hertzberg) of 2016*, would have required all eligible counties to be included in the annual federal waiver of the ABAWD time limitation and would have deleted the authorization for CDSS to implement this provision by all-county letters or similar instructions. *SB 904 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

*AB 2151 (Chu) of 2016*, would have adopted a special diet or food preparation needs allowance for CalWORKs participants, and would have modified the current CalWORKs allowance for recurring special needs. *AB 2151 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

California State Council of Service Employees International Union (SEIU California) (Co-Sponsor)  
End Child Poverty CA (Co-Sponsor)  
Alliance for Children's Rights  
California Primary Care Association  
California Teachers Association  
Children Now  
Indivisible CA StateStrong  
Legislative Action Committee - Santa Clara County School Boards Association  
Los Angeles County Office of Education  
SEIU California State Council

### **Opposition**

None on file.

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