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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

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### AB 2765 (Ahrens) - CalFresh and CalWORKs: childhood hunger and foster youth

**Version:** June 11, 2026

**Urgency:** Yes

**Hearing Date:** June 29, 2026

**Policy Vote:** HUMAN S. 3 - 0

**Mandate:** Yes

**Consultant:** Agnes Lee

**Bill Summary:** AB 2765, an urgency measure, would require the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to take various steps in response to the impact of H.R. 1 (Public Law 119-21) on CalFresh benefits.

#### Fiscal Impact:

- Unknown ongoing General Fund costs to increase payment levels for the CalWORKs recurring special needs allowance and to provide a recurring special needs allowance to additional families.
- Unknown ongoing General Fund costs, potentially hundreds of thousands, for CDSS for state administration.
- Unknown one-time General Fund costs, potentially hundreds of thousands, to update the Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS).
- Unknown costs to counties for administration. Cost to counties would be potentially reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

#### Background:

**CalFresh.** CalFresh is California's version of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), an entitlement program that provides eligible households with monthly benefits to purchase food. Benefits are delivered through an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card which cardholders can use at authorized point-of-sale terminals. Grocers and other retailers are paid directly by the federal government for the dollar value of purchases made with CalFresh food benefits. Monthly benefits per household vary based on household size, income, and deductible living expenses. CDSS provides oversight for the CalFresh program at the state level, and counties are responsible for eligibility determinations and administration at the local level.

H.R. 1 made significant changes to the SNAP program, impacting California's CalFresh program. This included changes to the work requirements for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs). Under H.R. 1, the exemptions from ABAWD work requirements will decrease, and the number of people required to work to receive CalFresh benefits will increase. The work requirements will increase in most cases to include those 55 to 64 years old. Work requirements will also apply to parents and caretakers with children 14 and older, whereas previously those with children under 18 were excluded. Additionally, exemptions for veterans, people experiencing

homelessness, and former foster youth will be eliminated. The new law adds a new exemption for indigenous peoples, as defined.

States can apply for federal waivers to pause these rules, but only under specified criteria. Current law 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 exempt.

**CalWORKs.** CalWORKs provides temporary cash assistance aimed at moving children out of poverty and helping qualified low-income families meet their basic needs, such as rent, clothing, utility bills, food, and other items needed to ensure children are cared for at home and safely remain with their families. In addition to cash assistance, adult CalWORKs recipients are provided education, employment, and training services designed to help remove barriers to work and promote self-sufficiency.

Current law provides that, in addition to specified CalWORKs aid amounts, a family is entitled to receive an allowance for recurring special needs not common to a majority of recipients. These recurring special needs include, but are not limited to, special diets upon the recommendation of a physician for circumstances other than pregnancy, and unusual costs of transportation, laundry, housekeeping services, telephone, and utilities. The recurring special needs allowance for each family per month cannot exceed that amount resulting from multiplying the sum of \$10 by the number of recipients in the family who are eligible for assistance.

**Proposed Law:** Specific provisions of the bill would:

- Increase from \$10 to \$15, the amount used to factor the maximum monthly threshold for the CalWORKs recurring special needs allowance.
- Require that in addition to any amounts payable under the CalWORKs recurring special needs allowance, an adult who is a member of a household that is aided by the CalFresh or CalWORKs program and that includes a child 14 years of age or older and under 18 years of age, and who is discontinued as a result of the three-month time limit on federal SNAP aid newly applied to households with children under federal H.R. 1, is entitled to receive a separate recurring special needs allowance, as specified.
- Require the state and the counties to implement the applicable SNAP-related provisions under H.R. 1 by using all of the following steps:
  - Mitigate harm and minimize client impacts and discontinuances of benefits whenever possible.
  - Use data and research to inform decisions, monitor impacts, and make adjustments when necessary.
  - Actively seek insight from people with lived experience and from partners representing a variety of local and state sectors.

- Identify opportunities to improve existing processes in parallel with implementation efforts that center client and county user experience.
- Subject to an appropriation made by the Legislature, provide appropriate and adequate state funding and resources to the counties to administer the CalFresh program, provide case management, and properly screen recipients under the complex and challenging new changes set forth by H.R. 1.
- Require CDSS to adopt, provide instructions to counties on, and automate for, blanket exemptions to CalFresh work requirements, in accordance with federal law, for specified populations if eligible for the CalFresh program.
- Require that all exemptions provided by the state and the counties under H.R. 1 must, in accordance with federal law and guidance, remain in effect for any recipient until, at the earliest, the next scheduled redetermination for that recipient, when the exemption must be reassessed by the county, unless the automated exemption at redetermination allows for the exemption to continue.
- Require CDSS to provide data, on at least a monthly basis to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature, commencing on December 15, 2026, and by every 15th day of each month thereafter, on the total number of CalFresh recipients subject to, exempted from, or discontinued from the program due to, the CalFresh work requirements under H.R. 1.
- Prohibit a recipient from being discontinued from CalFresh due to the ABAWD work requirements under H.R. 1 in California before October 1, 2026, or until specified automation-related administrative activities are complete, whichever is later.
- Require CDSS to convene a working group to consider additional blanket exemptions to CalFresh work requirements, as specified.
- Require CDSS to adopt, provide instructions to counties on, and automate for, blanket compliance with CalFresh work requirements, in accordance with federal law, for individuals participating in extended foster care and who have been determined to be working at least 80 hours per week, as specified.
- Provide that “ABAWD participant,” for purposes of the existing requirement that CDSS seek an annual federal waiver related to the provision that an ABAWD is limited to three months of CalFresh benefits in a three-year period, includes 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.
- Require CDSS to seek a federal waiver 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; and require that the waiver 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.
- Contain an urgency clause.

**Related Legislation:**

SB 1201 (McNerney) would require CDSS to request specified federal waivers related to veterans' eligibility for CalFresh benefits. The bill is currently in the Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

AB 2299 (Calderon) would expand eligibility for the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to certain individuals ineligible for CalFresh benefits. The bill is currently in the Senate Human Services Committee.

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