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THIRD READING

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Bill No: AB 593  
Author: Wicks (D)  
Amended: 8/18/25 in Senate  
Vote: 21

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SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 5-0, 7/7/25  
AYES: Arreguín, Ochoa Bogh, Becker, Durazo, Limón

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: 13-0, 7/15/25  
AYES: Umberg, Niello, Allen, Arreguín, Ashby, Caballero, Durazo, Laird, Stern, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

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**SUBJECT:** CalFresh: data sharing

**SOURCE:** Author

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**DIGEST:** This bill clarifies that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) may identify data sharing opportunities with other state and local public entities for the purposes of improving the administration of, increasing participation in, and measuring the impact of CalFresh.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes under federal law the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to promote the general welfare and to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the nation's population by raising the levels of nutrition among low-income households. (7 United States Code (USC) 2011 et seq.)

- 2) Acknowledges access to sufficient affordable and healthy food as human right and requires state agencies and departments to consider this state policy. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) §18700)
- 3) Establishes CalFresh as California's implementation of the federal SNAP program. (WIC §18900)
- 4) Allows CDSS to identify data-sharing opportunities with other state and local public entities, for the purposes of improving the administration of CalFresh, increasing CalFresh participation, measuring the impact of CalFresh, and increasing access to critical public health and poverty-alleviating services and other services and benefits available to low-income individuals. (WIC §18901.59)
- 5) Restricts a state agency from disclosing personal information in a manner that would link the information disclosed to the individual to whom it pertains, unless specified exceptions apply. (Civil Code §1798.24)

This bill clarifies that CDSS may identify data-sharing opportunities with other state and local public entities for the purposes of improving the administration of CalFresh, increasing CalFresh participation, and measuring the impact of CalFresh, as well as other critical public health and poverty-alleviating services.

## **Background**

According to the author, “Last year I authored AB 518, requiring the CDSS to develop a methodology for determining the state’s CalFresh participation rate and identifying characteristics of residents who are eligible but not receiving benefits. This framework will be employed to shape outreach efforts and identify opportunities to remove barriers which prevent enrollment.

“The statute enacted through AB 518 allows CDSS to ascertain data sharing opportunities with other state and local public entities for the narrow purpose of improving CalFresh administration, increasing participation, and enhancing access to other services and benefits available to low-income persons. It does not compel state departments to share data, nor override any federal statute that governs allowable disclosure of data. It is also not intended to exempt the sharing of data from all state privacy laws without addressing confidentiality, privacy, and security of consumer data.

“AB 593 is legislation I committed to carry last year, in partnership with the Administration, to clarify limited and necessary exemptions from data sharing restrictions while allowing the disclosure of data for the narrow purposes of

improving CalFresh program administration. My goal is to strike a balance to protect Californians' privacy while permitting the careful use of data in a safe and tailored manner that will inform strategies to maximize CalFresh food benefits and decrease the number of low-income individuals and families facing hunger.”

*CalFresh.* CalFresh is California’s version of the federal SNAP, an entitlement program that provides eligible households with federally funded monthly benefits to purchase food. CalFresh food benefits are 100 percent federally funded. CalFresh administration costs are funded with 50 percent federal funds, 35 percent General Fund, and 15 percent county funds, except for state-mandated program changes. CalFresh food benefits are issued through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card which cardholders can use at point-of-sale terminals authorized by the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Recipients can buy groceries but are not allow to purchase “hot foods” or nonfood items. 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—with larger households generally receiving more benefits than smaller households and relatively higher-income households generally receiving fewer benefits than lower-income households. The average benefits in 2024 was \$279 a month for all households, \$496 for households with children, and \$166 for households with older adults.

In addition to standard CalFresh there are also pilot programs and related programs to help Californian’s in similar positions. For example, SUNBucks, is a program that provides an eligible family with additional cash aid for groceries in the summer months when children are out of school. Families are eligible for \$120 per child per summer. There is also the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) which provides food benefits to approximately 35,000 legal permanent residents who meet CalFresh eligibility criteria but are excluded from SNAP due to restrictions related to immigration status established in the 1996 federal welfare reform. Unlike CalFresh and SUN Bucks, CFAP is entirely state funded. There are also a number of pilot programs that expand the reach of CalFresh to meet the needs of participants who need to buy safe drinking water, parents who need to buy diapers, and any family that wants to buy more fruits and vegetables. All of these funds are accessible with an EBT card for recipients that qualify.

*CalFresh Enrollment.* The many state and federally sponsored nutrition programs are critical to the food insecure population. In 2024, approximately 5.4 million people received assistance purchasing food through CalFresh and that number is expected to increase. According to the Legislative Analyst’s Office, CalFresh

enrollment has increased 60 percent since the 2019- 2020 fiscal year due to a number of factors like the addition of SSI recipients and the COVID- 19 pandemic's effect on the economy. Growth is also expected in CFAP.

There are also many other state and federally funded programs that provide cash assistance to purchase food. There are emergency food programs that provide food directly through distributions from food banks, including programs for specific populations like college students through campus pantries or seniors through Meals on Wheels. These programs provide for individuals and families trying to make ends meet.

Despite the increase, California is still behind the national average enrollment rate for SNAP. Reasons commonly cited are lack of awareness about their eligibility, especially among college students, and difficulty applying. Application difficulties are especially acute among populations whose first language is not English and people with disabilities. In addition to the initial application, the process of recertifying eligibility or “churn” can decrease enrollment. Churn refers to the instance when a family that is on CalFresh and eligible, is automatically unenrolled because they did not complete the paperwork necessary to certify they are still eligible. They may later return but have disrupted access to resources.

AB 518 (Wick, 2024) took a step to address some of these issues by creating a methodology for estimating the CalFresh participation rate and identifying characteristics of Californians who are eligible for, but not receiving, CalFresh benefits and encouraging data sharing between state and local departments to better inform CalFresh outreach and administration.

### **Related/Prior Legislation**

AB 518 (Wicks, Chapter 910, Statutes of 2024) requires CDSS, in consultation with specified stakeholders, to develop a methodology to estimate the CalFresh participation rate in California and identify characteristics of Californians who are eligible for but not receiving CalFresh benefits. It also requires CDSS to identify data sharing opportunities with other state and local public entities.

AB 1961 (Wicks, 2024) would have required the Department of Food and Agriculture in consultation with specified state agencies to convene End Hunger in California Master Plan Task Force which will develop the End Hunger in California Master Plan. Requires the End Hunger in California Master Plan to make recommendations for future comprehensive strategies aimed at addressing access to healthy and culturally relevant food for all Californians, as specified. The

Plan must be distributed to the Legislature no later than January 1, 2027. The bill was vetoed by the Governor.

AB 1967 (Jackson, 2024) creates the Food Insecurity Officer within CDSS, appointed by the Governor. The bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 1952 (Mayes, 2018) would have required the CDSS, the State Department of Public Health, the State Department of Education, and the Department of Food and Agriculture, to develop a plan to end hunger. The bill would have CDSS to serve as the lead agency for the development of the plan. The bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No    Fiscal Com.: Yes    Local: No

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 8/26/25)

California Student Aid Commission

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 8/26/25)

None received

**ASSEMBLY FLOOR:** 79-0, 6/2/25

**AYES:** Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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8/26/25 16:22:43

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