

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 593 (Wicks)

As Amended August 18, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Strikes existing law that enumerated the public entities authorized to share data with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) for purposes related to CalFresh, while retaining the authority for CDSS to identify data-sharing opportunities with other state and local public entities, and any other unit of state government for these same purposes.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Strike existing law that enumerated the public entities authorized to share data with CDSS for 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.
- 2) Restore existing law that specifies increasing access to critical public health and poverty-alleviating services and other services and benefits available to low-income individuals is an allowable purpose for CDSS to identify data-sharing opportunities with other state and local public entities, and any other unit of state government.
- 3) Strike the requirement that information authorized to be disclosed be limited to information necessary for conducting outreach opportunities, facilitating enrollment in public benefits, and, measuring the impact of those efforts, and shall not be used for any other purpose.

COMMENTS

CalFresh. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is the largest federal food safety-net program that serves as the first line of defense against hunger and food insecurity for low-income households. In California, SNAP funds are administered through the CalFresh program. Overseen by CDSS and administered locally by county human services departments, CalFresh serves a large and diverse caseload, with substantial shares comprising low-income working families with children, elderly and disabled people, and very low-income individuals with substantial barriers to employment. Participants use electronic benefit transfer cards to purchase eligible food items such as fruits and vegetables, meat, dairy products, and seeds and plants that produce food at authorized retailers, including grocery stores, supermarkets, and farmers' markets.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) sets eligibility requirements for SNAP programs across the country, including gross and net income, household size, assets, and certain expenses. The basic rules to qualify is gross monthly income below 130% of the federal poverty line. Broad-based categorical eligibility gives states the option (that most states take, including California) to increase the gross income eligibility threshold up to 200% of the poverty line for SNAP recipients receiving support from other government programs. Effective October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025, these gross income limits for a household of three in the United States (U.S.) are currently \$2,798 per month, or \$33,576 annually.

CalFresh plays a critical role in reducing poverty and food insecurity in California. In early 2023, participation in CalFresh helped keep approximately 1.1 million Californians out of poverty. Research also shows that SNAP reduces overall food insecurity by about 20% and reduces food insecurity among children by approximately 33%. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, about 3.2 million households received a total of \$12.7 billion in CalFresh benefits, all federally funded, with an estimated average monthly benefit of about \$328 per household in 2024-25.

Federal Efforts to Access Sensitive, State-Held Data. In July 2025, the Leadership Conference's Center for Civil Rights and Technology, the Center for Democracy & Technology, and Protect Democracy released an explainer examining growing federal efforts to access sensitive, state-held administrative data. Traditionally, information collected by states, such as SNAP and Medicaid records, has been tightly controlled and shared with federal agencies only under strict legal safeguards. However, under new executive directives, the federal government is moving to consolidate and centralize access to this data, raising significant concerns about privacy, civil rights, and individual autonomy.

The shift began with a March 20, 2025 executive order from President Trump directing federal agencies to obtain "unfettered access" to state-held data from federally funded programs, including data managed by third-party vendors. Since then, several agencies have acted to implement this mandate. In May 2025, the USDA requested expansive personal information on all SNAP applicants and recipients dating back to 2020, including names, Social Security numbers, and addresses, from states and contracted payment processors.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued subpoenas for cash assistance data about low-income elderly disabled immigrants in California, while the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services transferred sensitive Medicaid data from several states, including California, Illinois, Washington, and D.C., to the Department of Homeland Security. By July 2025, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services granted ICE access to personal data for nearly 80 million Medicaid beneficiaries, including information on ethnicity and citizenship status. In parallel, federal officials began developing a searchable national citizenship database by combining federal and state records to verify eligibility for voting.

The explainer warns that centralizing a repository of sensitive data opens the door to mass surveillance, profiling, and algorithmic targeting, particularly against vulnerable communities such as immigrants, low-income households, and people with disabilities. It also deters individuals from seeking vital public benefits like SNAP and Medicaid out of fear that their personal information could be shared with immigration authorities or other federal agencies. Moreover, the integration of sensitive personal records into centralized databases increases the risk of cybersecurity breaches, exposing millions to identity theft and other harms.

Traditionally, federal agencies are bound by longstanding protections, including the Privacy Act of 1974, which requires public notices when new systems of records are created; the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1974, mandating public comment before data collection; and, the E-Government Act of 2002, which requires Privacy Impact Assessments. Additional constraints come from program-specific laws like Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and the federal SNAP statutes, as well as state-level privacy protections and data-sharing restrictions in contracts with third-party vendors. Despite these safeguards, the executive order's broad framing and agencies' recent actions suggest an intent to sidestep longstanding privacy norms.

In response to this fundamental shift in how personal data is governed and accessed in the U.S., *this bill* reverts provisions from Welfare and Institutions Code Section 18901.59 back to existing law that was established through AB 518 (Wicks), Chapter 910, Statutes of 2024, related to data sharing and use. *This bill* additionally removes the requirement that any information disclosed be limited solely to purposes such as conducting outreach, facilitating enrollment in public benefits, and measuring the impact of those efforts, as well as the prohibition on using the data for any other purpose. It also removes the provisions that would have allowed public entities, notwithstanding the Information Practices Act of 1977, and to the extent permitted by federal law, to share data with CDSS for specified purposes. Lastly, *this bill* repeals existing law by striking the list of public entities that were authorized to share data under this provision.

According to the Author

According to the Author, "Last year I authored AB 518, requiring the Department of Social Services (DSS) 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 ascertain opportunities to remove barriers which prevent enrollment.

"The statute enacted through AB 518 allows DSS 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.

"[This bill] 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."

Arguments in Support

The California Student Aid Commission writes in support stating, "[This bill] looks to clarify the limitations on information that CDSS and other state entities would be allowed to distribute as part of a data sharing agreement. This includes data that is necessary to conducting outreach opportunities, facilitating enrollment in public benefits and measuring the impact of CalFresh on the health of Californians."

Arguments in Opposition

No opposition on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, the August 18, 2025, version of this bill would result in negligible state costs.

VOTES:**ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 7-0-0**

YES: Lee, Castillo, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson, Celeste Rodriguez, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Sanchez, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0-0

YES: 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

SENATE FLOOR: 40-0-0

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

UPDATED

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