

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 777 (Celeste Rodriguez)

As Amended September 5, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires investor owned electric utilities (IOUs) and publicly owned electric utilities (POUs) to adopt data sharing agreements with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in order to maximize federal food assistance following disasters, including certain power outages. The bill also requires specified actions by the CDSS, including the generation of a report for submission to the Legislature.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Clarifies that data requests by the CDSS of utilities are limited to those in relation to addressing nutritional assistance during disasters
- 2) Clarifies the CPUC only directs the investor-owned utilities to develop agreements with CDSS, whereas, local governing boards of publicly owned utilities adopt agreements with CDSS.
- 3) Clarifies the data requested is aggregated by zip code
- 4) Deletes water and gas corporations from the requirements of the bill.
- 5) Authorizes (instead of requiring) the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the governing boards of electric publicly owned utilities (POUs) to establish any memoranda of understanding (MOUs) or other agreements to timely provide data to the CDSS.
- 6) Requires electric utilities to make a reasonable effort to provide aggregated customer outage data to CDSS within seven calendar days for outages of four hours or more, instead of just timely report.
- 7) Specifies data that must be provided by the electric utilities to the CDSS.
- 8) Requires CDSS to notify each electric POU of any changes to the federal requirements in a timely manner and requires CDSS to have contact with each electric utility, instead of requiring at least one dedicated point of contact.

COMMENTS

The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as The CalFresh Program in this state, issues monthly electronic benefits to eligible program participants that they may use to buy most foods at many markets and food stores. According to the CDSS Emergency Response Handbook, a household receiving CalFresh benefits that experiences a food loss – the spoilage or destruction of food purchased with CalFresh benefits as a direct result of a disaster, including a loss of power – may request replacement benefits by submitting a replacement affidavit within 10 days of loss. Counties are to verify conditions that justify a loss claim, and criteria for approving food replacement include evidence that at least 50% of households in the

area experienced food loss and that power outages lasted four hours or more. Counties rely on data provided by electrical utilities to verify outage conditions.

Due to concerns by electric utilities, the bill requires utilities to "make reasonable efforts" to provide the aggregated customer outage data requested of CDSS within seven calendar days, instead of a hard deadline of seven days, thereby providing utilities with some flexibility should they take longer to respond. Unfortunately, there have been instances when CDSS has not been able to secure the reimbursements due to electric utilities not reporting their data in a timely fashion (which is at the crux of this bill). This bill intends to reduce, if not eliminate, those instances, while providing utilities some flexibility.

According to the Author

According to the author, "During the January 2025 Southern California fires and windstorms, neighborhoods in California that were impacted by the emergency did not receive support they could have been eligible for. This included emergency food assistance through D-SNAP. AB 777 will maximize federal food assistance following disasters by ensuring that all public and private utilities serving California households provide the necessary data to draw down all available federal food assistance benefits."

Arguments in Support

Sponsors of the bill, including End Child Poverty CA, California Association of Food Banks and the Western Center on Law and Poverty state:

Costs for this bill are minor and absorbable and help to draw down millions in federally funded food benefits by maximizing Automated Mass Replacement of CalFresh benefits during power outages, and Disaster CalFresh benefits during significant disasters when families are in greatest need.

...With the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters in California, FEMA has designated 48 of 58 counties as moderate to very high risk. In 2023 alone, California implemented D-CalFresh on five separate occasions across 28 counties. The recent Los Angeles Firestorms and winds demonstrated that power can be out in several communities, simultaneously, straining the ability to timely collect all necessary data. Lack of timely or complete data from electric utilities can mean requests for federal assistance do not include eligible households or are not approved. For example, in Santa Clara in June 2023, FNS denied DSS' request for Disaster CalFresh. Maximizing federally funded food benefits like D-CalFresh and CalFresh will help to improve grocery affordability for low income Californians and electricity customers, who also struggle to afford utility bills.

Arguments in Opposition

Privacy advocates request that data sharing be specifically limited to declared states of emergency only.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

Unknown but potentially significant ongoing cost pressures (General Fund, federal funds, and local funds) due to an increased probability that eligible recipients will utilize available food

assistance benefits as a result of the MOU or other data sharing agreements promulgated as a result of this bill.

Unknown but potentially significant one-time and ongoing costs to CDSS to establish and participate in any data sharing agreements, maintain dedicated points of contact with utilities, and submit the required report to the Legislature.

The CPUC anticipates any costs would be minor and absorbable.

VOTES:

ASM UTILITIES AND ENERGY: 18-0-0

YES: Petrie-Norris, Patterson, Boerner, Calderon, Chen, Davies, Mark González, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Kalra, Papan, Rogers, Schiavo, Schultz, Ta, Wallis, Zbur

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: 71-0-8

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, 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, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Bryan, Chen, Ellis, Nguyen, Sanchez, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Wicks

UPDATED

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