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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**  
**Senator Becker, Chair**  
**2025 - 2026 Regular**

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**Bill No:** SB 1077  
**Author:** Gonzalez  
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**Urgency:** No  
**Consultant:** Naima Ford Antal

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**Fiscal:** Yes

**Subject:** CalFresh: federal government shutdowns

**SUMMARY**

This bill requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to create a landing page on its website that informs the public about the status of CalFresh during a government shutdown that affects CalFresh benefits. It also requires CDSS to work with stakeholders to create a communications plan for CalFresh recipients and public officials during a government shutdown. This bill also requires CDSS to create a benefit issuance mechanism that allows the department to quickly issue CalFresh benefits during a federal government shutdown that affects CalFresh benefit disbursement.

**ABSTRACT**

**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 USC 2011 et seq.*)
- 2) Establishes CalFresh as California's implementation of the federal SNAP program. (*Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] 18900*)
- 3) Declares that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food. (*WIC 18700(a)(1)*)
- 4) Establishes the State Emergency Food Assistance Program, administered by CDSS, to provide food and funding for the provision of emergency food to food banks established pursuant to the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program whose ongoing primary function is to facilitate the distribution of food to low-income households. (*WIC 18995*)
- 5) Requires relevant state agencies to develop and implement a statewide electronic benefits transfer (EBT) system to allow recipients of federal or state financial and food assistance because of their economic circumstances or social condition to access their benefits through electronic systems like automated teller machines, point-of-sale devices, or other devices that accept EBT transactions. (*WIC 10065- 10072*)

- 6) Requires the Office of Technology and Solutions Integration to implement a statewide automated welfare system (SAWS) for CalWORKs, CalFresh, Medi-Cal, the foster care program, the refugee program, and county medical services programs. (*WIC 10823*)
- 7) Requires the development of SAWS's enrollment and eligibility functionality, case management systems, ancillary services, public portals, and mobile applications to include the goal of minimizing the burden of the overall eligibility process for enrollment and retention of benefits for low-income Californians and streamlining interactions for both clients and eligibility workers and facilitating applicant and client submission of feedback. (*WIC 10823.3*)

**This Bill:**

- 1) Makes findings and declarations regarding the impact of the 2025 federal government shutdown on CalFresh recipients.
- 2) Requires CDSS to maintain a clearly marked landing page on the department's website to provide the public information about how CalFresh benefits will be impacted during a government shutdown that affects CalFresh. The website must include at least all of the following:
  - a. The status of the federal government shutdown and the availability of benefits.
  - b. To the extent possible, a timeline with the most updated information possible, including when benefits will be disrupted and which beneficiaries will be affected, as well as when benefits will be disbursed.
  - c. A "Frequently Asked Questions" section addressing questions and misinformation about the availability of benefits.
  - d. Information about where the public can find emergency food assistance including their local food banks.
  - e. Any relevant litigation being pursued by the State of California or other entities related to CalFresh benefits and the federal government shutdown.
- 3) Requires CDSS to consider information gathered from previous federal government shutdowns and information provided by local governments and stakeholders when developing the website landing page.
- 4) Requires CDSS to make accommodations for accessibility and language services for the landing page.
- 5) Requires CDSS to update the landing page at least every 24 hours until CalFresh benefits have been fully dispersed and the government has been restored.

- 6) Requires CDSS to create a strategic communications plan for use during a federal government shutdown that impacts the disbursement of CalFresh benefits in coordination with stakeholders. The communications plan must include at least the following:
  - a. Initial notification to all CalFresh participants within 24 hours of the department being notified by the Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that there will be a disruption in CalFresh disbursement.
  - b. Regular notification to impacted CalFresh participants that includes:
    - i. The current status of benefit disbursement.
    - ii. How to check their accessible CalFresh benefit balance.
    - iii. Whether the past month's benefit balances are available for use.
    - iv. Where to find factual, updated information on the federal government shutdown and the impacts on the disbursement of CalFresh benefits.
    - v. Where to find emergency food resources.
  - c. Daily emergency response briefings for local and state officials, local government agencies, community organizations, and participating retailers that include:
    - i. The current status of benefit disbursement.
    - ii. Whether the past month's benefit balances are available for use.
    - iii. Pertinent updates on court filings and decisions regarding benefit availability.
    - iv. Where to find factual, updated information to share with the public on the federal government shutdown and the impacts on the disbursement of CalFresh benefits.
    - v. Emergency actions the state is taking, including, but not limited to, additional funding and staffing for food banks.
- 7) Requires CDSS to issue guidance to county human services agencies for use during a federal government shutdown.
- 8) Requires CDSS to develop a benefit issuance mechanism that allows the department to rapidly provide nutrition benefits on an emergency basis in response to a federal government shutdown that impacts the disbursement of CalFresh benefits.
- 9) Requires the benefit issuance mechanism to issue nutrition benefits through the EBT system and in a manner that can target various populations depending on the purpose of the specific benefit.

- 10) Requires the mechanism to comply with all applicable state and federal law governing privacy and confidentiality.

### FISCAL IMPACT

This bill has not yet been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

### BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

#### **Purpose of the Bill:**

According to the author, “Over 5 million Californians rely on SNAP benefits, known as CalFresh in California. Frequent changes at the federal level, including last year’s government shutdown, have led to rapidly changing information and disruption in CalFresh benefit disbursement. Californians deserve quick and reliable information about essential benefits they rely on to meet their basic needs. SB 1077 will strengthen access to timely, accurate information by requiring CDSS to develop a strategic communications plan in response to federal shutdowns that disrupt the disbursement of CalFresh benefits. The lessons learned from last year’s events can serve as a starting point for building stronger communications systems with all impacted entities. Furthermore, the federal shutdown revealed that the state lacks the necessary infrastructure to issue state-funded benefits to CalFresh recipients on an emergency basis. SB 1077 will address this gap by requiring CDSS to create a mechanism for disbursing state benefits to CalFresh recipients during a future federal shutdown that impacts the disbursement of these benefits, if the Legislature appropriated funds for this purpose.”

#### *CalFresh*

CalFresh is California’s version of federal SNAP, an entitlement program that provides eligible households with federally funded monthly benefits to purchase food. Currently, CalFresh food benefits are 100 percent federally funded, but recent changes in federal law will require states to pay a portion of the benefit. 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. Benefits are delivered through an EBT card which cardholders can use at point-of-sale terminals authorized by the USDA. 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 benefit in 2025-2026 is approximately \$333 a month for all households.

CalFresh is the state’s largest anti- hunger program. In a study on income instability, the Public Policy Institute of California found that CalFresh helped families get through times of economic instability by providing a stable resource that was most impactful for families if they apply as quickly as possible after their income first becomes unstable versus applying after they have used up all of their savings and still need help.

*California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS)*

CalSAWS is a single statewide automated case management system for assisting in the administration of public benefits. These include CalFresh, CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal, and county-funded general assistance programs. Previously, California had multiple local and regional automated case management systems that were maintained through county led consortiums. Due to federal requirements, California was required to create a statewide automated system by 2023. That system was CalSAWS. Counties were required to retire their local automated benefit systems and exclusively use CalSAWS for eligibility determinations, case and information management, and benefits computations and delivery. CalSAWS is governed by a joint powers authority of county agencies. CalSAWS is the state entity that ensures the correct CalFresh participants receive the correct amount of benefit delivered onto their EBT cards for CalWORKs and CalFresh.

For CalFresh, the system does this by sending an issuance file with the names of CalFresh beneficiaries and the aid amounts they should receive, to the state's EBT vendor, Fidelity Information Services. This takes place weeks before families receive their benefits. The vendor then loads the EBT cards with the correct amounts on the correct issue dates, usually the beginning of the month.

### *EBT Cards*

The EBT system automates the delivery, redemption and reconciliation of multiple types of public assistance benefits, including CalFresh, CalWORKs, and General Assistance/General Relief. These EBT cards are similar to ATM cards. EBT card holders can access their benefits at approved point-of-sale terminals and ATM machines. EBT cards may be used at more than 27,000 businesses and over 38,000 ATMs across California in all 58 counties, according to CDSS. One of the primary purposes of the EBT card is to provide benefit recipients with a more inclusive and convenient way to use their benefits at a variety of businesses.

### *2025 Federal Government Shutdown*

Starting on October 1, 2025, after a failure to pass a continuing resolution to fund the government's operations, the federal government entered a shutdown. This meant many federal employees were furloughed and only essential government operations were allowed to continue. Later that month, the USDA sent a memo to states saying that there was not enough money available to fund CalFresh benefits in November 2025. The USDA also ordered states not to take any action to prepare benefits to be delivered to EBT cards. Specifically, CalSAWS could not transmit the issuance file to the state's EBT vendor as it usually would. However, the USDA did announce they could use contingency reserves, if needed, to fund the benefit. The contingency reserve was created to provide for beneficiaries in circumstances like a federal shutdown. Most recently, in 2024, Congress approved \$3 billion in contingency funds to be available for two years to cover any lapse in SNAP payments. The USDA did not confirm funding for administrative activities, but CDSS did confirm that funding was available to counties. After a policy reversal, the USDA did not use the contingency fund and the federal government did not fund SNAP benefits at the beginning of the month for the first time in the program's history. Several lawsuits were filed against the USDA including one co-led by California Attorney General Rob Bonta. A full discussion of the lawsuits is below.

In addition to filing lawsuits, states across the country, including California, responded to the lapse in federal funding on their own. California, which has approximately 5.2 million SNAP

recipients, allocated \$80 million to food banks and deployed the National Guard to distribute food. Actions were also taken locally by counties and school districts to provide emergency meals, provide gift cards, and other supports to CalFresh recipients.

In New York, which has approximately 2.9 million SNAP recipients, the Governor authorized \$100 million to be distributed to food banks and required the Empire State Service Corps and the SUNY Civic Engagement Corps to support food distribution. The Governor also encouraged schools to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students.

In South Carolina, which has approximately 591,000 SNAP recipients, the government worked with the Central Carolina Community Foundation to create the ONE SC Fund which coordinated donations for food banks and directed the National Guard to help distribute food.

In Virginia, which has approximately 850,000 SNAP recipients, the state government created the Virginia Emergency Nutrition Assistance program which used state funds to give SNAP recipients 25% of their normal SNAP allocation each week during the government shutdown.

In Hawaii, which has approximately 161,000 SNAP recipients, the state government created the HI Relief Program, using \$100 million of the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (known in California as CalWORKs) funds to provide extra assistance to families that are in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program but would lose SNAP aid. They also allocated \$2 million for food banks and \$500,000 for a farm to table program.

In Louisiana, which has approximately 792,000 SNAP recipients, the state government committed to providing partial payments on a weekly basis to SNAP beneficiaries using state funds. The partial payments would not go to SNAP recipients that were able-bodied adults that did not live with children, elderly or disabled adults, which according to the Louisiana Department of Health, is 6% of the SNAP population.<sup>1</sup>

#### *2025 Federal Government Shutdown Timeline*

In addition to the uncertainty created by the government shutdown, a significant amount of uncertainty was created by multiple memos from the USDA contradicting earlier advisories and in response to court actions. For CalFresh recipients, learning about the changes through the news led to additional distress and confusion causing them to seek information wherever they could. The benefit pause was also an unprecedented event for state agencies and officials that oversee the program that required a higher level of communication, strategy and nimbleness. The timeline below describes how quickly CalFresh policies and procedures changed over the final three weeks of the shutdown.

- October 10<sup>th</sup>: The USDA tells states not to send CalFresh issuance files to EBT vendors because there may be insufficient funds to pay benefits due to the government shut down. States would not be reimbursed if they use their own funds to pay benefits.
- October 25<sup>th</sup>: The USDA stated it believes it can no longer use the contingency fund to fund SNAP benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> [ldh.la.gov/news/snap-shutdown-state-assistance](https://ldh.la.gov/news/snap-shutdown-state-assistance)

- October 28<sup>th</sup>: California and 24 other states and the District of Columbia filed a lawsuit in the Massachusetts federal district court arguing the USDA is legally obligated to use the contingency fund.
- October 30<sup>th</sup>: Nonprofits, churches and households filed a lawsuit in the Rhode Island federal district court arguing that stopping SNAP benefits would cause immediate and irreparable harm to the families that rely on it.
- October 31<sup>st</sup>: The Massachusetts and Rhode Island federal district court required the federal government to pay the full SNAP benefit amounts by November 3<sup>rd</sup> or partial amount with the contingency fund on November 5<sup>th</sup>.
- November 1<sup>st</sup>: No SNAP benefits were issued.
- November 3<sup>rd</sup>: The USDA told the Massachusetts federal court that it would use the contingency fund to provide all SNAP recipients with 50% of their November benefit.
- November 4<sup>th</sup>: In a social media post, the President announced that SNAP benefits would not be paid until the government shutdown ends.
- November 6<sup>th</sup>: Partially in response to the social media post, the Massachusetts and Rhode Island federal district court issued an oral order to the USDA requiring them to issue full November benefits by November 7<sup>th</sup>.
- November 7<sup>th</sup>: The USDA sent a memo to state agencies saying that they would comply with the court and benefits can be fully paid. Some states moved forward sending the issuance files for SNAP benefits, including California through CalSAWS. Some states remitted partial payments and others did not pay any.
  - However, the USDA also appealed in the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit requesting an immediate stay of the rulings. The immediate stay was denied while the court was considering a longer stay of the Rhode Island ruling. The USDA then sought an immediate stay from the United States Supreme Court by 9:30pm that night. That stay was granted for 48 hours.
- November 8<sup>th</sup>: The USDA sent a memo telling states to undo any actions to provide November SNAP benefits or face penalties for using federal funds without authorization.
- November 9<sup>th</sup>: The United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit denied the second USDA request to stay the Rhode Island ruling and sent the issue to the United States Supreme Court again. The United States Supreme Court indicated it would not decide on the issue until November 13<sup>th</sup>.
- November 12<sup>th</sup>: A continuing resolution passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law causing the government shutdown to end and fund SNAP through September 2026.

This bill requires CDSS to create a communications plan that updates a government shutdown related webpage and brief officials and stakeholders daily during a government shutdown. It also

requires CDSS to create a mechanism to distribute CalFresh benefits if a government shutdown delays the normal disbursement of benefits. The author may want to consider specifying that the mechanism will not use federal funds in order to avoid potential penalties.

### *Food banks and Emergency Food Assistance*

Food banks are a significant part of California's food security safety net. It is estimated that 10 percent of Californians are supplementing their food costs with free food from an organization that is supplied by a food bank. Food banks distribute food to food pantries, community and senior centers that serve hot food, student pantries on college campuses and other organizations that provide free food to those who need it. California food banks receive funding from the USDA but also have received funding from the state since 2011 through the CalFood program. The CalFood program allocates funding to California's network of food banks to purchase food primarily sourced from California. Originally funding was \$8 million per year but when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the economy, the state significantly increased CalFood funding to an average of \$62.7 million per year. In October 2025, the Governor allocated an additional \$80 million to food banks to mitigate impacts of the government shutdown.

In 2024, the Legislature created the State Emergency Food Bank Reserve Program which requires CDSS to create a food distribution program solely for low-income families after a natural or man-made disaster. According to the think tank, Focus First on Children, "children's needs are too often sidelined in disaster recovery planning... Natural disasters also exacerbate existing inequities. Families of color, who are disproportionately low-income, are more likely to live in high-risk areas and face greater barriers to recovery."<sup>2</sup>

This bill requires CDSS to include information on its website about food banks and other emergency food sources. It also requires them to collaborate with the California Association of Food Banks on a communications strategy.

### **Related/Prior Legislation:**

**AB 2072 (Solache, 2026)** would create the CalFresh and Women, Infant and Children program Contingency Fund solely for the purpose of maintaining continuity of CalFresh or Women, Infant and Children program benefits during a federal government shutdown or other federal appropriations lapse. would require the departments to seek federal reimbursement for expenditures made from the fund or for loan repayments. AB 2072 is pending in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

**AB 2309 (Bains, 2026)** would, in the event of a federal funding lapse that results in the withholding, suspension, or delay of federally funded CalFresh benefits, require the State Department of Social Services to utilize state funds to ensure that CalFresh benefits continue to be issued to existing recipients. AB 2309 is pending in the Assembly Human Services Committee.

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<sup>2</sup>Lesley, Bruce. When Wildfires Rage, Children Should Never Be Left Behind. Focus First on Children. January 9, 2025. [firstfocus.org/update/when-wildfires-rage-children-should-never-be-left-behind/](https://firstfocus.org/update/when-wildfires-rage-children-should-never-be-left-behind/)

**SB 739 (Arreguin, 2025)** would require CDSS to inquire of the ability of each county facility that serves CalFresh participants in an impacted area during a federally declared state of emergency to provide timely and adequate service. AB 739 is on the Assembly Floor Inactive File.

### COMMENTS

SB 1077 would require CDSS to implement a number of new protocols during a government shutdown that affects the disbursement of CalFresh benefits. These protocols include communicating regularly with the public and public officials about the state of CalFresh benefits, creating a dedicated landing page on its website with relevant information and creating a mechanism that could quickly disburse CalFresh benefits to recipients. The actions taken by the federal government in 2025 during the government shutdown were unprecedented. It was the first time CalFresh benefits were not paid on time and contingency funds were not used. Over five million Californians faced uncertainty as to whether they would receive their food benefits. A number of policy reversals by the federal administration and court actions added more uncertainty and stress. This bill would standardize how CDSS should inform the public about the status of benefits and where they can find food assistance. It also requires the department to be prepared with a mechanism to load EBT cards with state-funded food assistance benefits if delay of CalFresh benefits happens again.

### POSITIONS

**Support:**

None received

**Oppose:**

None received

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