

THIRD READING

Bill No: SB 1077
Author: Gonzalez (D)
Amended: 3/16/26
Vote: 21

SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 5-0, 4/6/26
AYES: Becker, Ochoa Bogh, Laird, Pérez, Weber Pierson

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 6-0, 5/14/26
AYES: Cervantes, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NO VOTE RECORDED: Seyarto

SUBJECT: CalFresh: federal government shutdowns

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: 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 and 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.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes CalFresh as California's implementation of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) § 18900.)
- 2) Declares that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food. (WIC § 18700(a)(1).)

- 3) 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.)
- 4) 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.)
- 5) 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.)
- 6) 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 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.

Comments

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 2025–26 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.

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.

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.

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.

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, Infants, and Children Program Contingency Fund solely for the purpose of maintaining continuity of CalFresh or Women, Infants 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. The bill was held on the Assembly Appropriations Suspense file.

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. The bill was held on the Assembly Appropriations Suspense file.

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. The bill is on the Assembly Floor Inactive File.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee: “Unknown General Fund costs, potentially hundreds of thousands, for CDSS for state administration during a federal government shutdown.”

SUPPORT: (5/15/26)

California Association of Food Banks
California Grocers Association
County Welfare Directors Association of California
Grace INC
League of California Cities

OPPOSITION: (5/15/26)

None received

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