

Date of Hearing: June 16, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

SB 1077 (Gonzalez) – As Amended March 16, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 38-0

SUBJECT: CalFresh: federal government shutdowns

SUMMARY: 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; requires CDSS to work with stakeholders to create a communications plan for CalFresh recipients and public officials during a government shutdown; and 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. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires CDSS to maintain a clearly marked landing page on the department’s website to provide the public with 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.
- 2) 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.
- 3) Requires CDSS to make accommodations for accessibility and language services for the landing page.
- 4) 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.
- 5) 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.
- 6) Requires CDSS to issue guidance to county human services agencies for use during a federal government shutdown.
- 7) 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.
- 8) Requires the benefit issuance mechanism to issue nutrition benefits through the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) system and in a manner that can target various populations depending on the purpose of the specific benefit.
- 9) Requires the mechanism to comply with all applicable state and federal law governing privacy and confidentiality.

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 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 (CalSAWS) for California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids, 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)

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

COMMENTS:

Background: *Food Insecurity.* The USDA defines food security as consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Despite California declaring food as a human right through SB 628 (Hurtado), Chapter 879, Statutes of 2023, and producing nearly half of the nation’s fruits and vegetables, an estimated 1.75 million California households (12.5%) experienced food insecurity in 2024, according to the Current Population Survey. Contributing factors include income inequality, geographic barriers, and rising food prices.

Food insecurity has significant lifelong impacts. Households often must choose between food and other necessities such as rent or medication. Poor nutrition during pregnancy and early childhood is associated with adverse birth outcomes, developmental delays, and increased illness. Among older children and adolescents, food insecurity is linked to poorer academic performance, behavioral challenges, and higher-risk behaviors. Over time, it contributes to cycles of poverty and chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease, as well as stress, anxiety, and depression.

CalFresh. CalFresh, California’s implementation of the federal SNAP, is the state’s largest food assistance program and the primary way of reducing food insecurity. Administered by CDSS and county human services agencies, the program serves low-income families, seniors, people with

disabilities, and individuals facing barriers to employment. Recipients receive their monthly benefits via an EBT card to purchase eligible food 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. In 2024-25, about 5.5 million Californians received over \$12.5 billion in CalFresh benefits, all federally funded, with an average monthly benefit of about \$192 per person. Eligibility extends up to 200% of the federal poverty level under broad-based categorical eligibility.

CalFresh significantly reduces food insecurity. Research shows SNAP lowers overall food insecurity by about 20% and by 33% among children. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, CalFresh kept approximately 856,000 Californians out of poverty in 2023, including 312,000 children,¹ making it the state's largest poverty-reduction program.

2025 Federal Government Shutdown Impacts on CalFresh. The nation recently faced the longest federal government shutdown in history, which began on October 1, 2025, after Congress failed to pass a budget or continuing resolution. On October 10, 2025, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service notified states that available federal funds would be insufficient to fully fund November 2025 SNAP benefits nationwide (*see* All County Letter No. 25-75).² USDA directed states to pause submission of November benefit issuance files to EBT vendors. In response, CDSS instructed CalSAWS to delay sending these files to the state's EBT contractor, Fidelity Information Services. CDSS confirmed that it could continue covering administrative costs through December 2025. CDSS further warned that if the shutdown persisted beyond October 23, November benefits would be delayed. On November 1, 2025, SNAP benefits were not issued for the first time in the program's six-decade history, despite the existence of about \$5 billion in contingency funds.

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 who 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 10th: 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 shutdown. States would not be reimbursed if they use their own funds to pay benefits.
- October 25th: The USDA stated it believes it can no longer use the contingency fund to fund SNAP benefits.
- October 28th: 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.

¹ <https://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/>

² https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACLs/2025/25-75.pdf?ver=hbtOdbuxBHtEbj5_ZvQLPg%3d%3d

- October 30th: 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 31st: The Massachusetts and Rhode Island federal district court required the federal government to pay the full SNAP benefit amounts by November 3rd or a partial amount with the contingency fund on November 5th.
- November 1st: No SNAP benefits were issued.
- November 3rd: 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 4th: In a social media post, the President announced that SNAP benefits would not be paid until the government shutdown ends.
- November 6th: 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 7th.
- November 7th: 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 considered a longer stay pending review of the Rhode Island ruling. The USDA then sought an immediate stay from the United States Supreme Court by 9:30 pm that night. That stay was granted for 48 hours.
- November 8th: 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 9th: 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 13th.
- November 12th: A continuing resolution was passed by both houses of Congress and was signed into law, ending the government shutdown and funding SNAP through September 2026.

California's Response to the Federal Shutdown. In response to the panic of the possible impact to California's most vulnerable population, California took several actions to mitigate the harm to millions relying on food assistance. California launched "Operation Feed California" and fast-tracked the allocation of \$80 million to food banks and deployed the National Guard to assist with food distribution. Counties and school districts also provided emergency meals, gift cards, and other forms of assistance to CalFresh recipients.

CDSS sent out statewide messaging and direct client communications to the entire ongoing CalFresh caseload via text and email, when an email address was provided by a household.

California also joined over 22 other states in a successful lawsuit against federal administration officials for the unlawful withholding of SNAP/CalFresh funding.

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.

Other States Responses to the Federal Shutdown. In response to the lapse in federal SNAP funding, states across the country implemented emergency measures to support affected households.

In New York, which serves approximately 2.9 million SNAP recipients, the Governor authorized \$100 million in funding for food banks and directed the Empire State Service Corps and the SUNY Civic Engagement Corps to support food distribution efforts. Schools were also encouraged to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students.

In South Carolina, which has approximately 591,000 SNAP recipients, state officials partnered with the Central Carolina Community Foundation to establish the ONE SC Fund, which coordinated donations for food banks. The state also deployed the National Guard to assist with food distribution.

In Virginia, where approximately 850,000 residents receive SNAP benefits, the state created the Virginia Emergency Nutrition Assistance Program. Using state funds, the program provided SNAP recipients with weekly payments equal to 25% of their normal monthly SNAP benefit during the shutdown.

In Hawaii, which has approximately 161,000 SNAP recipients, the state launched the HI Relief Program. The initiative redirected \$100 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to provide additional support to families enrolled in TANF who had lost SNAP benefits. Hawaii also allocated \$2 million to food banks and \$500,000 to a farm-to-table program.

In Louisiana, which serves approximately 792,000 SNAP recipients, the state committed to issuing partial weekly payments using state funds. However, these payments excluded able-bodied adults without dependents who did not live with children, older adults, or individuals with disabilities. According to the Louisiana Department of Health, this group represented approximately 6% of the state's SNAP population.

Author's Statement: 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. [This bill] 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. [This bill] 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 appropriates funds for this purpose.”

Equity Implications: California has approximately 5.2 million CalFresh recipients, 63.2% of whom are children or elderly. When benefit delays, reductions, or lapses are threatened, then this already vulnerable population needs to prepare so their families do not starve. During the 2025 shutdown, there were many news reports and constant conflicting messaging from the federal government which made preparation difficult for families. *This bill* requires CDSS to communicate daily as well post on their webpage updates during a federal shutdown which may help CalFresh recipients know their options and prepare should the federal government shutdown again. *This bill* also requires CDSS to create a mechanism to issue benefits when a federal shutdown occurs which would allow families to continue receiving some benefits.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 2072 (Solache) of 2026, would have created 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. *AB 2072 was held on the Assembly Appropriations suspense file.*

AB 2309 (Bains) of 2026, would have, in the event of a federal funding lapse that results in the withholding, suspension, or delay of federally funded CalFresh benefits, required CDSS to utilize state funds to ensure that CalFresh benefits continue to be issued to existing recipients. *AB 2309 was held on the Assembly Appropriations suspense file.*

AB 1211 (Sharp-Collins) of 2025, would have required CDSS, if the federal government reduced SNAP benefits, to ensure that CalFresh benefits remain at current levels, and to use state funds if federal funding was insufficient, among other things. *AB 1211 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

Arguments in Support: The sponsors of this bill, Western Center on Law & Poverty, contend that this bill “will prepare California for potential future shutdowns by requiring CDSS to create a strategic communications plan, including a public webpage with information and food resources, and regular communications to impacted recipients and briefings for public officials and stakeholders. It will also require CDSS to develop the capacity to disburse state-funded benefits to CalFresh recipients during future federal shutdowns if the Legislature appropriates funds for this purpose.”

Arguments in Opposition: None on file.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Western Center on Law & Poverty (Co-Sponsor)

California Association of Food Banks
California Grocers Association
County Welfare Directors Association of California
End Child Poverty California powered by GRACE
League of California Cities

Opposition

None on file.

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