

SENATE THIRD READING
SB 1077 (Gonzalez)
As Amended August 13, 2026
Majority vote

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.

Major Provisions

- 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.
- 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 72 hours until CalFresh benefits have been fully disbursed and the government has been restored.
- 5) Requires CDSS to create a strategic communications plan by January 1, 2028, 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) Updates to the landing page on the department's internet website and deployment of social media posts within 72 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 updates thereafter that include, but are not limited to:
 - 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) Emergency response briefings, as needed, 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.
- 10) Delays implementation until CDSS notifies the Legislature that the Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) can perform the necessary automation to implement this bill.

COMMENTS

Background: 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 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits nationwide (see All County Letter No. 25-75). 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.

- 1) 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.
- 2) October 25th: The USDA stated it believes it can no longer use the contingency fund to fund SNAP benefits.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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.
- 5) 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.
- 6) November 1st: No SNAP benefits were issued.
- 7) 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.
- 8) November 4th: In a social media post, the President announced that SNAP benefits would not be paid until the government shutdown ends.
- 9) 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.
- 10) 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.
 - a) 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.

- 11) 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.
- 12) 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.
- 13) 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.

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."

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.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee on June 28, 2026:

CDSS estimates the following costs:

- 1) One-time General Fund (GF) automation costs of approximately \$400,000 to \$500,000 for changes to the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) and the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system to create a benefits issuance mechanism. CDSS indicates the system changes will require 12 months to implement.
- 2) Minor and absorbable costs to establish a strategic communication plan, issue guidance to counties, and maintain a landing page on the department's website during a federal government shutdown.
- 3) Future GF cost pressures during each federal government shutdown of an unknown amount but potentially in the low millions of dollars, to implement the initial notification components of the strategic communications plan, including costs for printing, mass mailers, and electronic communication charges.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 38-0-2

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

ABS, ABST OR NV: Choi, Niello

ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 7-0-0

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

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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