
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1201 (McNerney) - CalFresh: veteran eligibility

Version: February 19, 2026

Policy Vote: HUMAN S. 4 - 0, M.&V.A. 3 - 0

Urgency: No

Mandate: Yes

Hearing Date: May 4, 2026

Consultant: Agnes Lee

Bill Summary: SB 1201 would require the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to request specified federal waivers related to veterans' eligibility for CalFresh benefits.

Fiscal Impact:

- The CDSS estimates one-time General Fund costs of \$390,000 for updates to the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS).
- Unknown potential costs to counties for CalFresh administration. Costs would be potentially reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

Background: CalFresh is California's version of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), an entitlement program that provides eligible households with monthly benefits to purchase food. Benefits are delivered through an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card which cardholders can use at authorized point-of-sale terminals. 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. CDSS provides oversight for the CalFresh program at the state level, and counties are responsible for eligibility determinations and administration at the local level.

H.R. 1 (Public Law 119-21). H.R. 1 made significant changes to the SNAP program, impacting California's CalFresh program. This included changes to the work requirements for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs). Under H.R. 1, the exemptions from ABAWD work requirements will decrease, and the number of people required to work to receive CalFresh benefits will increase. The work requirements will increase in most cases to include those 55 to 64 years old. Work requirements will also apply to parents and caretakers with children 14 and older, whereas previously those with children under 18 were excluded. Additionally, exemptions for veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and former foster youth will be eliminated. The new law adds a new exemption for indigenous peoples, as defined. States can apply for federal waivers to pause these rules, but only under specified criteria.

CalFresh Employment and Training (CalFresh E&T) program. Current law provides that in a county that elects to participate in the CalFresh E&T program, a veteran applying for CalFresh benefits who is required to register to work, but who is exempt from

mandatory placement in the CalFresh E&T program, must be given the opportunity to participate as a volunteer in the CalFresh E&T program, and must be provided with a referral to the local county veterans service office and a referral to veterans' assistance and job training agencies, if those veterans' assistance and job training agencies are known to the county.

Proposed Law: Specific provisions of the bill would:

- Require CDSS to submit a request to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to waive federal provisions to exclude the costs incurred by a veteran associated with the veteran's job search from countable income in the determination of eligibility and benefit level for purposes of receiving CalFresh benefits.
- Require CDSS to submit a request to the USDA to waive applicable provisions of H.R.1 to exempt the following veterans from the time limit and associated work requirements:
 - Veterans discharged for less than one year.
 - Veterans with children in their home.
 - Veterans who have a pending disability claim with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.
 - Homeless veterans.
- Require a county participating in the CalFresh E&T program to provide referrals to the local county veterans service office and to veterans' assistance and job training agencies whether or not the veteran is exempt from mandatory placement in the CalFresh E&T program.

Related Legislation: AB 2299 (Calderon) would expand eligibility for the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to individuals ineligible for CalFresh benefits solely due to the federal time limits placed on ABAWDs, regardless of if they are a citizen or noncitizen. The bill is currently in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

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