

Date of Hearing: August 5, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 1201 (McNerney) – As Amended May 14, 2026

Policy Committee:	Human Services	Vote:	7 - 0
	Military and Veterans Affairs		8 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: Yes Reimbursable: Yes

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to request specified federal waivers related to veterans' eligibility for CalFresh benefits.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires CDSS, by April 1, 2027, to submit a request to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to waive applicable provisions of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to exclude the costs incurred by a veteran associated with a job search from countable income when determining the veteran's eligibility and benefit level for the purposes of receiving CalFresh benefits.
- 2) Requires CDSS, by April 1, 2027, to submit a request to the USDA to waive applicable provisions of federal House Resolution 1 (H.R. 1) (Public Law 119-21) to exempt from the Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) time limit and associated work requirements veterans who (a) have been discharged for less than one year, (b) have children in their home, (c) have a pending disability claim with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), or (d) are homeless.
- 3) Requires CDSS to implement each of the above requested waivers within six months from approval of the waiver.
- 4) Requires a county that participates in the CalFresh Employment and Training (E&T) program to give a veteran applying for CalFresh benefits who is required to register to work the opportunity to participate in the CalFresh E&T program, whether or not the veteran is exempt from mandatory placement in the program.

FISCAL EFFECT:

If both federal waivers are approved, CDSS estimates the following costs:

- 1) Beginning upon completion of the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) automation, ongoing General Funds costs to counties, likely in the low millions of dollars annually for CalFresh administration due to an increase in the CalFresh caseload.
- 2) One-time General Fund automation costs of \$391,000 for updates to CalSAWS, which include updating logic calculations of income and expenses to exempt job search costs,

updating CalFresh household budgets to add a new expense type line item, updating state forms in all threshold languages, updating rules for work registration exemptions, creating a batch job to identify who qualifies for the exemptions, and updating related pages and reports within the systems.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

[This bill], the No Hungry Heroes Act, is a necessary response to HR 1, which eliminated long-standing protections for veterans facing hunger. California is home to more veterans than any other state, and with approximately 115,000 of them relying on CalFresh, the impact of these federal policies will be devastating. This bill seeks to protect our veterans and their families by requesting the removal of unnecessary barriers to food assistance and ensuring that those who sacrificed for our country are not penalized while they look for work or recover from service-connected disabilities.

This bill has broad support from veterans and military organizations, food banks, the County of San Diego, and SEIU California. There is no known opposition.

2) **Background. CalFresh.** The CalFresh program is California's version of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides monthly food assistance to qualifying low-income households. CDSS administers approximately \$12.6 billion federal SNAP funds annually through the CalFresh program, serving about 5.5 million CalFresh participants.

CalFresh benefits are 100% federally funded. Costs to administer the program are shared among the federal government, the state, and counties. Eligibility is primarily based on household income, assets, and household composition. Because CalFresh is largely governed by federal law, the state has limited authority to modify eligibility rules.

H.R. 1. In July 2025, President Trump signed H.R.1, which contained many changes, including cuts to SNAP that reduced food assistance for millions of families. There are various populations of Californians eligible for CalFresh, including those referred to as Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents, or "ABAWDs." Under CalFresh rules, ABAWDs are generally limited to three months of benefits within a 36-month period, subject to age limitations and certain exemptions. States may apply for federal waivers to pause these rules, but only under specified criteria.

H.R.1 changed the ABAWD time-limit rules by expanding the age range subject to the time limit from age 54 to age 64, requiring an eligible household to include a child under age 14, rather than under age 18, eliminating exemptions for former foster youth, veterans, and homeless individuals, and limiting area unemployment waiver eligibility. These changes took effect June 1, 2026, and are expected to increase the number of individuals subject to the time limit and at risk of losing CalFresh benefits unless they qualify for an exemption or meet work requirements.

This bill impacts veterans, a subset of ABAWDs, by requiring CDSS to submit federal waiver requests to exclude veteran job-search costs from CalFresh eligibility and benefit-level calculations and to exempt certain veterans from the ABAWD time limit and associated work requirements, as changed by H.R. 1.

- 3) **Related Legislation.** AB 2765 (Ahrens), an urgency measure of this legislative session, requires CDSS to take various steps in response to the impact of H.R. 1 on CalFresh benefits.
- 4) **Prior Legislation.** SB 950 (Archuleta), Chapter 877, Statutes of 2022, required CDSS, by July 1, 2023, and annually thereafter, to submit a request for a federal waiver to exclude the basic allowance for housing provided to specified uniformed service members from countable income when determining eligibility and benefit levels for purposes of receiving CalFresh benefits.

Analysis Prepared by: Jennifer Swenson / APPR. / (916) 319-2081