

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

SJR 3 (Arreguín) – As Introduced March 27, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 38-0

SUBJECT: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SUMMARY: Urges the United States (U.S.) Congress to avoid any cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

EXISTING LAW:

State law:

- 1) Acknowledges access to sufficient affordable and healthy food as a human right and requires relevant state agencies and departments to consider this state policy. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 18700)
- 2) Establishes the CalFresh program to administer the provision of federal SNAP benefits to families and individuals meeting certain criteria, as specified. (WIC § 18900 *et seq.*)
- 3) Establishes, in the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Act, a system for the distribution and use of public assistance benefits, such as California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) and CalFresh, and requires EBT access to be provided through automated teller machines, point-of-sale devices and other devices that accept EBT transactions. (WIC § 10065 *et seq.*)
- 4) Requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to use state funds appropriated for the Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP) Cash-In Supplemental Nutrition Benefit Program to provide nutrition benefits to continuing CalFresh households that were eligible for and receiving CalFresh benefits as of June 1, 2019, but for whom the household's monthly CalFresh benefit was reduced when a previously excluded individual was added to the household. (WIC § 18900.6 *et seq.*)
- 5) Creates the Safe Drinking Water Supplemental Benefit Pilot Program until September 30, 2025, as a state-funded program to provide additional CalFresh nutrition benefits for interim assistance to purchase safe drinking water in areas where it is necessary. (WIC § 18901.25)
- 6) Requires CDSS, subject to an appropriation by the Legislature in the annual Budget Act or another statute for this purpose, to administer the CalFresh Minimum Nutrition Benefit Pilot Program to provide 12 months of additional state-funded nutrition benefits to ensure eligible households receive a supplement that, when added together with the federal allotment, totals no less than \$50. (WIC § 18901.26(a))
- 7) Creates the California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project, which provides eligible CalFresh participants with additional benefits to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. (WIC § 10072.3)

- 8) States legislative intent to maximize food access for all CalFresh recipients. (WIC § 18919.1(a))
- 9) Defines “food bank” to mean a surplus food collection and distribution system operated and established to assist in bringing donated food to nonprofit charitable organizations and individuals for the purposes of reducing hunger and supplying nutritional needs. (Health and Safety Code § 113783)

Federal law:

- 10) Establishes SNAP pursuant to the Food Stamp Act of 1964. (7 United States Code § 2011 *et seq.*)

FISCAL EFFECT: This resolution was keyed non-fiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

Background: *Food Insecurity.* The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which monitors food insecurity and oversees the nation’s largest food aid programs, defines food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.” It categorizes food security into four levels:

Ranges of Food Security

LEVEL OF SECURITY		DEFINITION
Food Secure	High Food Security	Households had no problems, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food
	Marginal Food Security	Households had problems or anxiety at times about accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety and quantity of food were not substantially reduced
Food Insecure	Low Food Security	Households reduced the quality, variety and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted
	Very Low Food Security	At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money or other resources for food

Sources: Feeding America, What is Food Insecurity? <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/> (Accessed March 1, 2020)

While California declared food as a human right in 2023 [SB 628 (Hurtado), Chapter 879, Statutes of 2023], and produces nearly half of the nation’s fruits and vegetables, data from the U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey shows that as of September 2024, 22% of California households are food insecure and 27% of households with children are food insecure, with deep disparities for Black, Latino, and Native households. Factors contributing to food insecurity include socioeconomic disparities and geographic barriers, among other causes. For individuals facing food insecurity, the choice is often between nurturing their physical health and maintaining other aspects of their lives, such as purchasing necessary medications or paying rent to maintain housing.

A lack of adequate food can have long-term physical health consequences across the lifespan. During pregnancy, it can lead to poor birth outcomes, impacting a child’s physical and cognitive development. Young children with inadequate or interrupted food intake are at a higher risk of

iron deficiency, respiratory illnesses, infections, and developmental delays. In school-aged children, food insecurity is associated with poor academic performance, attention difficulties, and behavioral issues. In adolescence, food insecurity is associated with having many sexual partners, drug and alcohol abuse, greater exposure to violence, high-risk pregnancy, and suicide ideation. Long-term, these disadvantages contribute to intergenerational cycles of poverty and food insecurity. In adulthood, food insecurity increases the risk of chronic, diet-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers due to poor nutrition and limited access to healthcare. Beyond physical health, the emotional and psychological stress of uncertain food access causes anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

CalFresh. SNAP (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) is the largest federal food safety-net program that serves as the first line of defense against hunger and food insecurity for low-income households. In California, \$12.6 billion of federal SNAP funds are administered through the CalFresh program, serving approximately 5.4 million CalFresh participants and covering 100% of the program's benefit costs.

Overseen by CDSS and administered locally by county human services departments, CalFresh serves a large and diverse caseload, with substantial shares comprising low-income working families with children, elderly and disabled people, and very low-income individuals with significant barriers to employment. Participants use EBT cards to purchase eligible food items 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.

The USDA establishes the gross and net income requirements for CalFresh eligibility, limiting California's flexibility in setting its own criteria. Currently, the maximum allowable gross income is 200% of the federal poverty level, although households with elderly members or members with disabilities are not subject to gross income criteria. Effective October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025, these gross income limits for a household of three in the U.S. are currently \$2,798 per month, or \$33,576 annually.

Under federal rules, adults between 18 and 49 years of age without dependents can only receive CalFresh benefits for three months within a 36-month period unless they meet work requirements for at least 20 hours per week. However, California requested and received a statewide Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) waiver of this time limit, allowing ABAWDs to continue receiving CalFresh without work requirements. This waiver was originally set to expire on January 31, 2027; however, on May 21, 2025, the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service informed California that they reevaluated its policy surrounding two-year waiver approvals and have rescinded all two-year waivers and reissued them as one-year waivers. As a result, California's two-year statewide ABAWD time limit waiver has been reissued as a one-year waiver, effective February 1, 2025, and is set to expire on January 31, 2026, which means work requirements will be reinstated.

CalFresh plays a critical role in reducing poverty and food insecurity in California. In early 2023, participation in CalFresh helped keep approximately 1.1 million Californians out of poverty. Research also shows that SNAP reduces overall food insecurity by about 20% and reduces food insecurity among children by approximately 33%. In addition to reducing poverty and food insecurity, access to CalFresh benefits has been shown to improve long-term health, economic, and social outcomes for individuals and families across different stages of life.

CalFresh Benefit Levels. As of September 2024, the minimum CalFresh benefit in California was \$23 per month for households of one or two. The USDA's Thrifty Food Plan (Thrifty), which estimates the cost of purchasing a nutritious diet at a minimal cost, determines the maximum monthly SNAP benefit. The Thrifty annually adjusts the benefit amount to reflect changes in food prices. The most recent major update occurred in 2021, resulting in a 21% increase in benefit amounts, the first major revision since 2006. Effective October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025, the maximum CalFresh benefit for a household of one is \$292 per month, while a household of three could receive up to \$768 per month. However, most households do not receive the maximum benefit. In 2024, the average monthly benefit in California was \$189 per person.

The figure below shows the relationship between a family's income, SNAP benefits, and food spending. The horizontal axis represents a family's income, while the vertical axis shows both SNAP benefits and total food spending. Families with no income receive the maximum SNAP benefit for their household size. However, as income increases, SNAP benefits gradually decrease due to a 30% benefit reduction rate. This means that for every \$1 increase in net income, SNAP benefits decrease by \$0.30. For example, in 2022, a three-person household with no income would receive approximately \$658 per month in SNAP benefits. If the same household had \$1,000 in income, their monthly SNAP benefit would decrease to around \$358.

The graph also shows that as a household's income increases, total food spending, including both SNAP benefits and out-of-pocket expenses, tends to increase. Most families spend more on food than their SNAP benefits alone, supplementing their grocery budget with personal funds. While some families fully utilize their SNAP benefits each month, others report spending less than the maximum benefit amount. As income grows, SNAP benefits account for a smaller proportion of a family's total food spending because benefits decline while food spending increases. This reflects the program's design to provide greater assistance to families with the greatest financial need while gradually reducing support as household income rises.

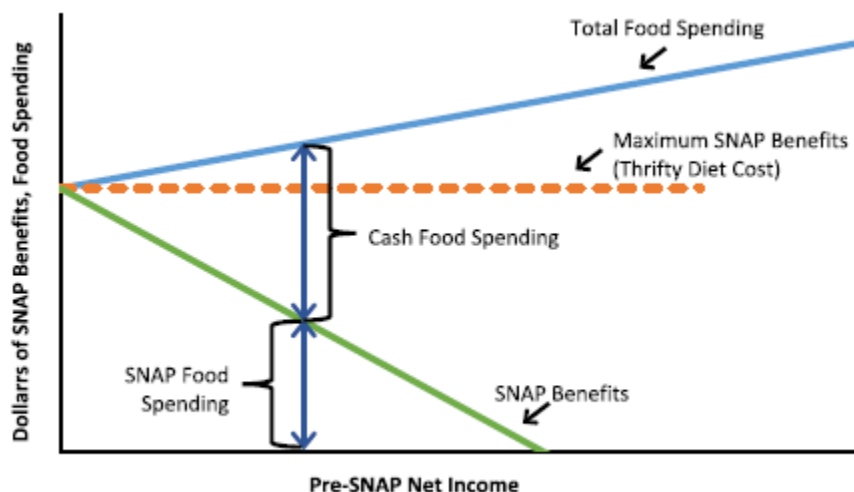


Fig. 2. Stylized Relationship Among Income, SNAP and Food Spending. Notes: Adapted from Hoynes et al. (2016).

However, while CalFresh provides critical support, research has shown that the purchasing power of SNAP benefits is often inadequate to fully meet household food needs throughout the entire month. Any reductions in SNAP benefits would lower SNAP food spending, increasing the amount of cash spending required to meet food needs.

Economic Impact of CalFresh. In addition to addressing food insecurity, CalFresh significantly boosts California's economy. According to the USDA, every \$1 in federally funded CalFresh benefits generates approximately \$1.50 in economic activity. Furthermore, every \$1 billion in CalFresh benefits generates over 10,000 jobs across sectors such as agriculture, transportation, and retail.

Conversely, lower CalFresh benefits may impose significant economic costs. Food insecurity has been linked to higher healthcare costs, particularly due to increased rates of chronic illnesses, hospitalizations, and nursing home stays. According to research, hunger costs the U.S. economy at least \$77.5 billion annually in healthcare costs alone. However, expanding CalFresh access could reduce healthcare costs by an estimated \$1,400 per low-income adult per year and produce substantial savings for state Medicaid programs by preventing avoidable hospitalizations and chronic health conditions.

Potential SNAP Benefit Cuts. In May 2025, the House Agriculture Committee approved an unprecedented \$300 billion in cuts to SNAP over the next decade as part of a broader budget reconciliation bill, which extends or makes permanent provisions from the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 that were scheduled to expire at the end of 2025. According to an analysis by Penn Wharton, University of Pennsylvania:

The possible economic gains during the first decade are driven by increases in savings and labor supply, as households face a weaker social safety net associated with reductions in spending. On a conventional basis, households in the first income quintile lose about \$860 in 2026, reflecting net reductions in taxes and transfer, including cuts to Medicaid and SNAP. The top 10% of the income distribution receives about 70% of the total value of the legislation...On a dynamic lifetime basis, lower-income households and some in the middle class are worse off, despite positive economic effects. All future generations are worse off.

With that in mind, any cuts to SNAP would result in a loss of essential food assistance for low-income households, exacerbating food insecurity and hardship across the nation and generations. According to the Congressional Budget Office, proposed cuts include:

- Limiting cost adjustments to the Thrifty from annually to every five years, reducing benefit value (\$37 billion in "savings");
- Reducing the federal contribution to SNAP administrative costs from 50% to 25%, shifting 75% of the burden to states (\$27 billion);
- Restricting internet utility cost deductions for shelter expenses to only elderly or disabled households (\$17 billion). The Standard Utility Allowance helps determine SNAP eligibility by covering costs like rent, utilities, and taxes. The excess shelter deduction is capped at \$712 for households without an elderly or disabled member;
- Requiring state agencies to use SNAP overpayment data to prevent overpayments of other benefits (\$7 billion);
- Eliminating the National Education and Obesity Prevention Program for SNAP participants, which provides nutrition education (\$5 billion);

- Imposing a zero-tolerance policy for SNAP error payments, which includes both overpayments and underpayments to SNAP participants, reducing the acceptable error rate from \$37 to \$0 (\$80 million). States with high payment error rates for two consecutive years face penalties. The 2023 national payment error rate was 11.68%, with California at 13.4%;
- Requiring states to contribute between 5% and 25% toward SNAP benefits by 2028 based on their payment error rates (\$128 billion). According to the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture, between 2010-19, the hypothetical state cost-share for California was 5%. Based on the 2023 error rate, California would contribute 25%, along with 25 other states; and,
- Raising the work requirement age limit from 54 to 64, limiting exemptions to caregivers of children under 7 years of age, and requiring proof of 20 hours of work per week or loss of benefits (92 million), which could result in millions losing access to SNAP. As mentioned earlier, California has an ABAWD work requirement waiver until January 31, 2026, which means work requirements will be reinstated upon waiver expiration.

Such proposals would abandon the national commitment to provide low-income individuals, including 1 in 5 children, a SNAP benefit that is sufficient to afford an adequate diet. If the \$300 billion reduction occurs, California could lose \$30 billion or more in federal SNAP funding between 2026 and 2034. These cuts would harm millions of Californians and force state policymakers to make difficult decisions on how to mitigate the funding gaps to prevent further erosion of essential public services that help promote economic security. Lawmakers are working under a self-imposed deadline to finalize the bill by July 4, 2025, but the exact timing could shift depending on negotiations and amendments.

Author's Statement: According to the Author, "Many low income families rely on Cal Fresh benefits to make ends meet. Without such benefits, thousands of families will go hungry, and have no way to provide for their families. For most households, the monthly gross income must be at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level for the household size.

"One in six families with children experience food insecurity according to the Public Policy Institute of California. Two-thirds of California's 24,000 college students are experiencing food insecurity, according to the California Student Aid Commission, which sounded an alarm after its 2023 survey of students. Cal Fresh is delivered to beneficiaries on Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, so families can buy locally grown produce, eggs, meats and other goods at local grocery stores.

"Congress is proposing cutting one-fifth of the program's funding, or \$230 billion. Such deep cuts are projected to mean significant increases in food insecurity and hunger. In California, where the average SNAP benefit was about \$6 per person per day, food insecurity is already an established concern.

"Given the importance of SNAP benefits to alleviate hunger and the impact to grocers, especially in rural areas, the California Legislature asks Congress to support the SNAP program at its existing level."

Equity Implications: *This resolution* urges Congress to maintain SNAP funding and prevent harmful cuts, which would disproportionately harm low-income families and individuals who

rely heavily on CalFresh to purchase food. Vulnerable populations, including seniors, college students, disabled individuals, single-parent households, and unemployed persons, would experience heightened food insecurity if benefits are cut. Reduced benefits can lead to detrimental health impacts, particularly for children, who may experience developmental issues due to inadequate nutrition. Moreover, financial stress on low-income individuals, particularly among Black and Latino communities, could intensify, potentially leading to higher incidences of homelessness, malnutrition, and reliance on other social services. Maintaining SNAP funding at current levels would provide a safety net that helps prevent these negative outcomes.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 936 (Lee) of 2025, would have made the California Fruit and Vegetable Pilot permanent and rename it the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits Program. *AB 936 was held on the Assembly Committee on Appropriations suspense file.*

AB 1211 (Sharp-Collins) of 2025, would have required CDSS, if the federal government reduces SNAP benefits, to ensure that CalFresh benefits remain at current levels, and to use state funds if federal funding is insufficient. Would have required CDSS to conduct a feasibility study on increasing eligibility and benefits of the CalFresh program. *AB 1211 was held on the Assembly Committee on Appropriations suspense file.*

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Association of Food Banks
Californians for SSI
Grace - End Child Poverty CA
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County

Opposition

None on file.

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