

Date of Hearing: April 14, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

AB 2299 (Calderon) – As Amended April 6, 2026

SUBJECT: California Antihunger Response and Employment Training Act of 2026

SUMMARY: Renames and revises the California Food Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants (CFAP) by removing outdated federal eligibility references, extending eligibility to individuals ineligible for CalFresh due to able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) time limits or humanitarian immigration status. Requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide state-funded benefits to those populations and revises benefit calculations. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Creates the California Antihunger Response and Employment Training Act of 2026.
- 2) Renames the California Food Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants to the California Food Assistance Program.
- 3) Strikes references to Public Law 104-193 and any subsequent amendments thereto relating to CFAP eligibility for noncitizens of the United States (U.S.) whose immigration status meets the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility criteria in effect on August 21, 1996, but who are ineligible for federal SNAP benefits solely due to immigration status.
- 4) Expands CFAP eligibility to include individuals ineligible for CalFresh benefits solely due to the federal time limits placed on ABAWDs, regardless of whether they are a citizen or noncitizen, and humanitarian immigration status.
- 5) Adds to CDSS' requirement relating to using state CFAP funds to provide nutrition benefits to households to include those that are ineligible for CalFresh benefits solely due to the federal ABAWD time limit, regardless of citizenship status, and humanitarian immigration status.
- 6) Clarifies that the benefit amount of a CFAP recipient who is an excluded member of a CalFresh household shall be limited to the amount that the recipient would have received as their share of a CalFresh household benefit, had they not been excluded due to their humanitarian status or expired federal time limit.
- 7) Strikes the requirement that CFAP be implemented only during any period that federal benefits are provided under 12) below in federal law.
- 8) Makes the following findings and declarations:
 - a) One in five Californians suffers from food insecurity;
 - b) The federal SNAP, known as CalFresh in California, is the most important defense against hunger, helping millions of Californians prevent hunger and its long-term consequences;

- c) SNAP not only helps prevent hunger among low-income households, it also creates jobs and supports our food economy across the state;
 - d) The passage of federal House Resolution 1 (H.R. 1; Public Law 119-21) marked the largest cut to CalFresh in program history, with 1,000,000 Californians expected to lose vital benefits;
 - e) Hunger never makes any person better able to prepare for work, secure a job, or succeed at their place of employment. It only makes them, and our economy, weaker and less able to persevere during hard times;
 - f) In addition, cutting low-income Californians from CalFresh disconnects them from CalFresh Employment and Training programs, which can help them reduce barriers to unemployment and gain new skills that increase their employability and likelihood of their future economic success;
 - g) California will establish a state food assistance program that will serve low-income, out-of-work, underemployed, and job-seeking Californians who are impacted by these ill-conceived federal actions; and,
 - h) The Legislature encourages CDSS to find prospects for comparable employment and training opportunities for individuals receiving benefits through CFAP.
- 9) Makes technical changes.

EXISTING LAW:

State law:

- 1) Establishes access to sufficient, affordable, and healthy food as a human right and requires state agencies and departments to consider this state policy when it is pertinent to the distribution of sufficient, affordable food. (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) Requires CDSS to establish CFAP to provide assistance for persons who are not eligible for federal SNAP benefits solely due to their immigration status. Requires, when possible, that the income, resources, and deductible expenses of those who receive CFAP benefits to be excluded when calculating CalFresh benefits. (WIC § 18930 *et seq.*)
- 4) Requires an individual 55 years of age or older, subject to an appropriation in the annual Budget Act, to be eligible for CFAP if the individual's immigration status is the sole basis for their ineligibility for CalFresh benefits. (WIC 18930(c)(1))
- 5) Specifies that noncitizens of the U.S. are eligible for CFAP if the person's immigration status meets the SNAP eligibility criteria in effect on August 21, 1996, but is not eligible for SNAP benefits solely due to their immigration status. (WIC § 18930(c)(3))

- 6) Requires an applicant who is otherwise eligible for CFAP but who entered the U.S. on or after August 22, 1996, to be eligible for CFAP if the applicant is sponsored and one of the following apply: the sponsor has died; the sponsor is disabled; or, the applicant, after entry into the U.S., is a victim of abuse by the sponsor or the spouse of the sponsor if the spouse is living with the sponsor. (WIC § 18930(c)(4))
- 7) Requires the amount of nutrition benefits provided to each CFAP household to be identical to the amount that would otherwise be provided to a household eligible for CalFresh benefits. (WIC § 18930(d)(1))
- 8) Requires, except as otherwise provided, the federal and state laws and regulations governing the federal Food Stamp to also govern CFAP. (WIC § 18932(a))
- 9) Requires the development of the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) 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)

Federal law: *Note: For the purposes of referring to federal law accurately, this section uses the term “alien” which is not a term used in the Committee or California, per AB 1096 (Luz Rivas), Chapter 296, Statutes of 2021.*

- 10) Establishes SNAP pursuant to the Food Stamp Act of 1964. (7 United States Code [U.S.C.] § 2011 *et seq.*)
- 11) Establishes the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation (PRWORA) Act of 1996, restricting eligibility of aliens for many federal benefit programs, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Social Security Income, Medicaid, and SNAP, except for “qualified aliens.” (Title IV of Public Law 104-193; 8 U.S.C. §§ 1601-1646)
- 12) Establishes citizenship requirements for SNAP benefits, including that undocumented immigrants are ineligible for SNAP, as specified. (7 Code of Federal Regulations § 273.4.)
- 13) Restricts SNAP eligibility for qualified noncitizens and provides eligibility only for specified exempt groups such as refugees, asylees, certain veterans and military families, individuals with disabilities, children, elderly individuals, certain tribal members, and lawful permanent residents (LPRs) after five years. (8 U.S.C. § 1621(a))
- 14) Authorizes a state to provide that an alien who is not lawfully present in the U.S. as eligible for any state or local public benefit for which such alien would otherwise be ineligible only through the enactment of a state law after August 22, 1996, which affirmatively provides for such eligibility. (8 U.S.C. § 1621(d))
- 15) Amends SNAP through the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 by expanding work requirements, restricting eligibility for certain noncitizens, and shifting a portion of benefit and administrative costs to states, among other things. (7 U.S.C. § 2011 *et seq.*; Public Law 119-21)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown, this bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

Background: *CalFresh*, California's implementation of the federal SNAP, is the state's largest food assistance program and primary lifeline for residents struggling with food insecurity. Administered by CDSS and county human services agencies, *CalFresh* provides monthly food benefits via an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card that can be used to purchase eligible food such as fruits and vegetables, meat, dairy products, and seeds at authorized retailers, including grocery stores and farmers' markets.

Eligibility is primarily based on household income, assets, and household composition. Households may be categorically eligible if they receive or are eligible for programs such as the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs), General Assistance/General Relief, Social Security Income/State Supplementary Payment, Cash Assistance for Immigrants, or Tribal TANF. Because *CalFresh* is largely governed by federal law, the state has limited authority to modify eligibility rules.

In 2024-25, about 5.5 million Californians received over \$12.5 billion in federally funded *CalFresh* benefits, with an average monthly benefit of about \$192 per person, or \$6.46 per day. Research shows SNAP reduces food insecurity by about 20% overall and by 33% among children. The Public Policy Institute of California estimates *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.

CalFresh/SNAP Changes in H.R. 1: ABAWD Time Limits. On July 4, 2025, H.R. 1 was signed into law and made significant changes to ABAWD time-limit rules by expanding the age range subject to the time limit, narrowing exemption criteria, and limiting state and county waiver eligibility. These changes take 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.

Under *CalFresh* rules, ABAWDs are generally limited to three months of benefits within a 36-month period unless they qualify for an exemption, meet work requirements, which is an average of 20 hours per week or 80 hours per month, live in an area with a time-limit waiver, qualify for an additional three-month eligibility period, or receive a discretionary exemption. While H.R. 1 does not change the overall structure of the ABAWD time-limit policy, it significantly changes who is subject to the time limit and who qualifies for exemptions.

According to All County Letter (ACL) 25-93,² federal law previously defined ABAWDs as individuals 18 through 49 years of age without dependents who did not qualify for an exemption. The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 increased the upper age limit to 54 years of age, and H.R. 1 further increased the upper age limit to 64 years of age. Individuals 60 through 64 years of age remain exempt from general work requirements due to age but may still be subject to the

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

² <https://cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACLs/2025/25-93.pdf?ver=Ib9riEMEV474i6-xtntg4g%3d%3d>

ABAWD time limit unless they qualify for another exemption. Individuals are no longer considered ABAWDs beginning the month they turn 65 years of age.

H.R. 1 also made significant changes to ABAWD exemptions by adding a new exemption for individuals who meet the definition of Indian, Urban Indian, or California Indian under federal law and eliminating temporary exemptions for veterans, individuals experiencing homelessness, and former foster youth under 25 years of age. H.R. 1 modified the dependent child exemption by limiting it to individuals responsible for the care of a dependent child under 14 years of age, rather than individuals living with a child under 18 years of age.

Research shows that when time limits are imposed, program participation drops significantly, largely because individuals are cut off from assistance rather than because they obtain employment.³ Studies also show time limits do not significantly increase employment or earnings, and most individuals subject to time limits already work at some point before or after receiving food assistance, often in low-wage jobs with unstable hours. When food benefits are cut off, individuals often struggle to afford food, housing, and healthcare, increasing hardship without improving employment outcomes.

CDSS estimates that the expanded ABAWD definition will increase the affected population from about 345,400 to 954,800 individuals, with approximately 665,500 individuals expected to be subject to the time limit and potentially lose CalFresh eligibility, including 250,000 individuals who have been identified as homeless. The remaining 289,000 individuals are expected to either meet work requirements or qualify for an exemption. CDSS expects these discontinuances to occur gradually over 12 months during annual recertifications.

CDSS estimates the net administrative cost to implement ABAWD changes in 2025-26 at \$2.7 million General Fund (GF; \$7.5 million total funds), which was included in the June 2025 Budget prior to the enactment of H.R. 1. While no new additional funding has been provided in the current fiscal year or proposed in the Governor's 2026-27 Budget to implement the changes or address the projected CalFresh caseload reductions, the budget authorized up to \$35 million General Fund for implementation, including up to \$15 million for CDSS, and up to \$20 million to support county implementation. On April 7, 2026, the Department of Finance approved \$20 million GF to provide counties one-time funding to support administrative readiness efforts for the June 1, 2026, implementation of H.R. 1 ABAWD provisions.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, every \$1 in federally funded CalFresh benefits generates approximately \$1.50 in economic activity, and every \$1 billion in CalFresh benefits generates over 10,000 jobs across sectors such as agriculture, transportation, and retail, resulting in an estimated \$5.3 billion in total annual economic activity. If CFAP is expanded to cover individuals who lose CalFresh eligibility, the state could lose an estimated \$1.6 billion in annual economic activity. Additionally, hunger costs the U.S. economy at least \$77.5 billion annually in health care costs alone. Expanding access to food assistance could reduce healthcare costs by an estimated \$1,400 per low-income adult per year and generate savings for state Medicaid programs by preventing avoidable hospitalizations and chronic health conditions.

³ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/worsening-snaps-harsh-work-requirement-would-take-food-assistance-away#:~:text=SNAP's%20Harsh%20Work%20Requirement%20Takes,that%20year%2C%20Census%20data%20show.&text=Work%20rates%20among%20SNAP%20households,at%20some%20point%20during%202023.>

This bill expands CFAP to provide state-funded food benefits to individuals who lose CalFresh eligibility solely due to the federal ABAWD time limit, which includes populations previously exempt from the ABAWD time limits such as veterans, individuals experiencing homelessness, and former foster youth under 25 years of age.

California Food Assistance Program. Prior to PRWORA of 1996, most lawfully residing noncitizens were eligible for federal nutrition assistance on the same basis as U.S. citizens. PRWORA significantly restricted eligibility for federally funded food assistance by rendering many lawfully present noncitizens, particularly LPRs, ineligible until they had resided in the U.S. for five years or met other qualifying criteria. In response, the federal government allowed states to provide state-funded food assistance to these populations using the existing SNAP benefit delivery infrastructure if the state reimbursed the federal government for the cost of benefits.

California established CFAP to provide state-funded nutrition benefits to certain noncitizens who are ineligible for CalFresh solely due to immigration status. CFAP benefits are issued through the same EBT system and administered through CalSAWs, and benefit amounts are equal to CalFresh benefits. Subsequent federal legislation restored SNAP eligibility for many lawfully present noncitizens, including individuals who have resided in the U.S. for five years, children under 18 years of age, and individuals receiving disability-related assistance. CFAP currently serves approximately 59,300 individuals.

The state has taken steps in recent budget actions to expand CFAP eligibility. Subject to appropriation, the state plans to expand CFAP to all income-eligible undocumented individuals 55 years of age and older, with implementation expected on October 1, 2027, following delays related to automation and budget constraints. The administration has estimated that this expansion could eventually cost approximately \$169 million annually, although the Legislative Analyst's Office has indicated that actual costs could be significantly higher due to uncertainty in estimating the eligible population and potential enrollment growth. According to the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), California has the largest share of undocumented immigrants than any other state, but its share has fallen from 23% to 16%, representing 2.25 million immigrants in 2023.⁴

CalFresh/SNAP Changes in H.R. 1: Noncitizen Eligibility. According to ACL 25-92,⁵ H.R. 1 did not change the definition of "qualified aliens" under PROWRA but amended the Food and Nutrition Act to significantly narrow noncitizen eligibility for SNAP. Under H.R. 1, SNAP eligibility is limited to U.S. citizens, noncitizen U.S. nationals, LPRs, individuals residing in the U.S. under a Compact of Free Association, and Cuban and Haitian entrants.

Effective April 1, 2026, several categories of lawfully present noncitizens who are not LPRs are no longer eligible, including refugees, asylees, parolees (unless they are Cuban and Haitian entrants), individuals with deportation or removal withheld, conditional entrants, trafficking survivors, battered noncitizens, and certain Afghan and Ukrainian parolees. These individuals may become eligible for CalFresh or CFAP if they adjust to LPR status and meet or are exempt

⁴ <https://www.ppic.org/publication/immigrants-in-california/>

⁵ <https://cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACLs/2025/25-92.pdf?ver=PRtQKSFGm1objM-ai4SirA%3d%3d>

from the five-year waiting period. The PPIC reports that 80% of immigrants were either citizens or had some other legal residency status in 2023, down from 83% in 2022.

This bill expands CFAP to provide state-funded food benefits to individuals who are ineligible for CalFresh solely due to their humanitarian immigration status.

Author’s Statement: According to the Author, “As our version of the federal SNAP program, CalFresh has helped millions of Californians afford groceries for their families. However, with the signing of H.R. 1 President Trump drastically cut federal funding to SNAP and CalFresh. Specifically, H.R. 1 initiates stricter work requirements, removes eligibility for certain lawfully present immigrants, and shifts billions of dollars in program costs from the federal government onto states. If we do not act as a state, nearly a million Californians will lose access to CALFRESH, that helps put food on the table.”

Equity Implications: Recent federal changes to SNAP eligibility and ABAWD time-limit rules disproportionately affect low-income immigrants, individuals experiencing homelessness, veterans, and older adults with limited employment opportunities. Time limits disproportionately impact communities that already face discrimination and barriers to employment, including people of color, former foster youth, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and older adults. Due to inequities in the labor market, 23% of Black SNAP recipients lose benefits due to time limits compared to 16% of white recipients. Many individuals subject to work requirements face barriers such as unstable housing, health limitations, criminal records, lack of transportation, and caregiving responsibilities, making rigid hourly work requirements difficult to meet even for those actively seeking employment.

By expanding CFAP to provide state-funded nutrition benefits to individuals who are ineligible for CalFresh solely due to federal ABAWD time limits or humanitarian immigration status, *this bill* may help mitigate the loss of food assistance for vulnerable populations who may remain income-eligible and reduce food insecurity.

Arguments in Support: According to the Sponsors of this bill, GRACE End Child Poverty CA, Public Interest Law Project, California Association of Food Banks, Western Center on Law & Poverty, and the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organization write, “California’s food system economy is one of our most important. When people are cut off from food assistance, the amount of money they’ll have to spend in California grocery stores will be reduced, harming our state’s economy. We saw this not too long ago with the CalFresh delay during the 2025 government shutdown. Not only will gross sales decline in one of our most important industries, but the workers in that industry will face increased job insecurity. Additionally, many of these workers may themselves be cut off from benefits, as many food retailer workers also get SNAP. [This bill] will prevent hunger, promote employment, and support California’s food economy.”

Arguments in Opposition: None on file.

Policy Considerations: The current federal option that California uses to administer CFAP is limited to specified populations excluded from federal benefits under PRWORA and uses the same EBT system as CalFresh. The state is currently implementing a CFAP expansion to undocumented individuals 55 years of age and older beginning October 1, 2027, which requires CalSAWs integration and the development of a separate state-funded EBT system. The infrastructure being developed for CFAP expansion could potentially be used to serve

individuals who become newly ineligible for CalFresh due to recent federal changes. However, expanding CFAP eligibility to additional populations like ABAWDs and humanitarian immigrants who lose CalFresh eligibility due to H.R. 1 would require completion of ongoing automation updates and could affect the planned October 1, 2027, implementation timeline.

The Author may wish to consider how eligible populations would be incorporated relative to the planned expansion to undocumented individuals 55 years of age and older, as the lack of specified implementation sequencing could affect implementation and automation timeline, and administrative workload.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

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 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 Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

SB 245 (Hurtado) of 2023, would have removed the 55 years and older age limit for noncitizens eligible for CFAP if the noncitizens satisfy all eligibility criteria for participation in CalFresh except any requirements related to immigration status. *SB 245 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 311 (Santiago) of 2023, is identical to SB 245 (Hurtado, 2023) and SB 464 (Hurtado, 2021). *AB 311 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

SB 464 (Hurtado) of 2021, is identical to SB 245 (Hurtado, 2023) and AB 311 (Santiago, 2023). *SB 464 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 135 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 85, Statutes of 2021, provided \$5 million in the 2021 Budget Act to expand food assistance CFAP to individuals 55 years of age and older, who are ineligible for CalFresh benefits due solely to their immigration status.

AB 221 (Santiago) of 2021, would have required CDSS to provide food assistance benefits statewide to low-income California residents, regardless of their immigration status, among other things. *AB 221 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 1096 (L. Rivas), Chapter 296, Statutes of 2021, struck the offensive and dehumanizing term "alien" used to describe a person who is not a citizen or national of the U.S. where it appears in multiple California code sections, and replaced it with other terms that do not include the word "alien," and made other nonsubstantive changes.

AB 826 (Santiago) of 2020, would have required CDSS to establish a program to provide eligible immigrants with a cash benefit intended for food assistance. *AB 826 was vetoed by Governor Newsom.*

SB 1443 (Rubio) of 2020, would have made all noncitizens, regardless of immigration status, eligible for CFAP aid. *SB 1443 was held in the Senate Rules Committee.*

AB 1770 (Alejo) of 2016, would have extended eligibility for nutrition assistance under CFAP to a noncitizen who is lawfully present in the U.S., provided they met all remaining eligibility requirements. *AB 1770 was vetoed by Governor Brown.*

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Association of Food Banks (Co-Sponsor)
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organization (Co-Sponsor)
Grace - End Child Poverty CA (Co-Sponsor)
Pubic Interest Law Project (Co-Sponsor)
Western Center on Law and Poverty (Co-Sponsor)
APIs for Civic Empowerment
ACCE Action (Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment)
Asian Law Alliance
Bay Area Legal Aid
Bill Wilson Center
California Center for Movement Legal Services
California Family Resource Association
California Immigrant Policy Center
California LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network
California Rural Legal Assistance
California Work and Family Coalition
Central California Food Bank
Centro Legal De LA Raza
Child Abuse Prevention Center and its Affiliates Safe Kids California, Prevent Child Abuse
California and the California Family Resource Association
Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County
Disability Rights California
Equal Rights Advocates
Equality California
Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
Food for People, the Food Bank for Humboldt County
Food in Need of Distribution Food Bank
Food Share Ventura County
Friends Committee on Legislation of California
Fullwell
G.R.A.C.E. Social and Medical Services
Glide Foundation
Homeless Action Center
Housing California
Hunger Action Los Angeles
LA Best Babies Network
Law Foundation of Silicon Valley
Legal Aid of Sonoma County
Legal Services of Northern California
Los Angeles Food Policy Council
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank

Lutheran Office of Public Policy - California
Maternal and Child Health Access
Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County
Nourish California
Orange County United Way
Para Los Ninos
Prosper CA Coalition (formerly Caleitc Coalition)
Public Interest Law Project
Rio Hondo College
Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services
Sacred Heart Community Service
San Diego for Every Child
San Diego Hunger Coalition
San Francisco-Marin Food Bank
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County
Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz County
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley
The Resource Connection Food Bank
United Ways of California
Western Center on Law & Poverty
Westside Food Bank
Women's Foundation California
Young Invincibles
Yuba Sutter Food Bank
One private citizen

Opposition

None on file.

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