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AB 2765: CalFresh and CalWORKs: childhood hunger and foster youth

SUMMARY

AB 2765 directs the California Department of Social Services to seek exemptions for specified foster youth with medical and behavioral diagnoses in their case plans from the newly imposed time and work requirements for CalFresh benefits.

BACKGROUND

Existing law establishes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which aims to provide food benefits to needy families to supplement their diet and improve access to healthy food. Although the federal government provides funding for SNAP, each state is responsible for developing eligibility standards and facilitating implementation. California uses a program called CalFresh, which is overseen by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).

In 1996, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which imposed major reforms on SNAP. Among other changes, it created the "able-bodied adult without dependent" (ABAWD) requirement. This limited an adult who does not care for dependents or work at least twenty hours a week to three months of food benefits. California has historically sought waivers to this three-month limit for CalFresh recipients.

PRWORA also established the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, which aims to fund programs to address the causes of child poverty. California responded by establishing the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program, which provides cash assistance and supportive services to low-income families. This includes a special needs allowance for families experiencing extenuating circumstances, such as dietary restrictions or unusual costs of essential services. The payment is capped at $10 per family member per month.

PROBLEM

On July 4, 2026, President Donald Trump signed into law H.R. 1. This legislation enacted dramatic cuts to social services nationwide and introduced new requirements for SNAP eligibility. Specifically, adults with dependents age 14 or older are now also subject to the three-month ABAWD limit on SNAP benefits. Additionally, former foster youth, veterans, and individuals experiencing homelessness are now also subject to this time limit.

Despite there being no evidence that people are more able to find and keep work if they are experiencing hunger or their children are experiencing hunger, H.R. 1 applies cuts to food benefits for foster youth and families with dependent children if the household fails to show proof of adequate work for adults in the household over the age of 18.

As a result, approximately 610,000 CalFresh beneficiaries will now be subject to work requirements. Although 115,000 of these individuals currently work 20 or more hours per week, the other 495,000 are subject to discontinuance of benefits when these changes

go into effect on July 1st, 2026. During a period of significant food inflation, these cuts to food benefits threaten the fabric of our social safety nets and put many children at risk of experiencing hunger.

SOLUTION

AB 2765 ensures eligible current and former foster youth do not lose access to critical nutrition benefits during the transition to implement the newly impose time and work requirements for CalFresh benefits. Specifically, the bill increases the statewide Special Needs allowance from a $10 multiplier to $15 per recipient, as well as enable CDSS to provide exemptions to CalFresh work and time requirements for youth who have, or had, an open child welfare or probation case and have a documented behavioral or physical health condition in their case plan.

SUPPORT

SEIU California (Co-sponsor)
End Child Poverty in California (Co-sponsor)
John Burton Advocates for Youth (Co-sponsor)
Alliance for Children's Rights
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California Family Resource Association
California Teachers Association
California WIC Association
Child Abuse Prevention Center and its Affiliates Safe Kids California, Prevent Child Abuse California and the California Family Resource Association
Children Now
Santa Clara County School Boards Association
Los Angeles County Office of Education
California Primary Care Association
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