

Plan to Respond to Impacts of the Federal Shutdown related to CalFresh

November 4, 2025

Marla Stuart, MSW PhD, Director

Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD)

Recommendation

1. ADOPT a resolution proclaiming a local emergency caused by the disruption of funding for CalFresh food assistance benefits, including the activation of County disaster service workers.
2. ALLOCATE up to \$21,000,000 from the General Fund from the following sources and in the following order to purchase debit cards for distribution to CalFresh eligible households for the month of November 2025 and DIRECT the County Administrator, or designee to prepare a Budget Amendment to effectuate the final allocation decision of the Board of Supervisors:
 - a. \$8,181,373. General Fund Unassigned Fund Balance. *This is the amount of COVID-19 FEMA reimbursement revenue that was received by the County after the FY25-26 Budget Adoption and is currently not appropriated in FY25-26. (4/5 Vote Required)*
 - b. \$9,729,868. Appropriation for Contingencies. *This is the amount of COVID-19 FEMA reimbursement that was deposited into the Appropriation for Contingencies during the FY25-26 Budget Adoption. (4/5 Vote Required)*
 - c. \$3,088,759. Appropriation for Contingencies. *(4/5 Vote Required)*
3. AUTHORIZE the distribution of debit cards to November CalFresh Eligible Households and authorize the Employment and Human Services Director to execute a related contract amendment.
4. DIRECT the Employment and Human Services Director to report to the Board of Supervisors, within 60 days, on the need for continuing the local emergency.
5. PROVIDE additional direction to staff on steps to mitigate the disruption of funding for CalFresh food assistance benefits.

Situation

Congress has failed to pass a FFY2026 budget resulting in a government shutdown commencing on October 1, 2025. The federal government has declined to fund the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits during the government shutdown while Congress works towards approving an FFY 2026 budget. The USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) has suspended all SNAP benefits and prohibited states from paying for benefits and from sending the November benefits files to the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) vendors contracted to the federal government. This federal action:

- 1) **Threatens the food security** of 65,318 Contra Costa County households including 107,020 individuals, 55% (58,861) of whom are children and seniors;
- 2) **Threatens the financial sustainability** of the 706 county retailers who made sales to CalFresh recipients totaling \$16,299,089 in September, 2025; and
- 3) **Threatens the capacity** of members of the Contra Costa County Food Collaborative to meet the hunger needs of the community members who seek their services.

Background

SNAP is a 100% federally funded benefit for households with incomes below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Benefit amounts are based on income and household size. In California, SNAP is called CalFresh. In September, 65,318 Contra Costa County households with 107,020 individuals received CalFresh for a total benefit issuance of \$21,089,996.

The following table provides SNAP eligibility criteria by household size and the average Contra Costa County September CalFresh benefit by family size.

Household Size	Maximum Monthly Income	Maximum Monthly Benefit	Maximum Benefit as % of Income*	# % of CCC Households	Average Monthly CCC Benefit
1	\$1,304	\$298	19%	42,372 65%	\$215
2	\$1,763	\$546	24%	11,171 17%	\$370
3	\$2,220	\$785	26%	5,712 9%	\$573
4	\$2,679	\$994	27%	3,360 5%	\$678
5+				2,703 4%	\$857

In past government shutdowns, the State of California has temporarily covered the federal costs of SNAP benefits and been reimbursed upon approval of the federal budget. This time, the federal government has prohibited states from funding the SNAP benefit amount. California has taken several steps to limit the impact including 1) advancing \$80 million in FY 25/26 CalFood allocations to food banks, including \$2.2 million to the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano; 2) authorizing California Volunteers and National Guard to provide people power and logistical support for food banks; 3) opening the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Department Operations Center (DOC) to provide coordination and support to counties and other partners; and 4) joining 19 other states in filing a Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief in the District of Massachusetts (Case 1:25-cv-13165).

Assessment

The failure of the federal government to fund SNAP benefits **threatens the food security of 65,318 Contra Costa County households** including 107,020 individuals, 55% (58,861) of whom are children and seniors. Households in the lowest income quintile spend 33% of their monthly income on food compared to only 8% for households in the highest income quintile (see Figure 1)¹. Research demonstrates that, compared to children who maintain consistent access to SNAP, children in families whose SNAP benefits are stopped are 78% more likely to be food insecure, 16% more likely to be in poor health, and 77% more likely to be at risk of developmental delay.² On average, SNAP households have redeemed 94% of SNAP benefits by the end of the benefit month and 40% of SNAP households have a balance of less than \$1. This indicates that the majority of households do not have accumulated benefits to rely on to feed themselves and their families, and that the majority of SNAP households will feel any pause in SNAP benefits immediately.ⁱ

¹ USDA - Food spending as a share of income declines as income rises. [Food spending as a share of income declines as income rises | Economic Research Service](#)

² Loss of SNAP is Associated with Food Insecurity and Poor Health in Working Families with Young Children, Ettinger de Cuba et al., Health Affairs, https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2018.05265?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rft_id=ori%3Arid%3Aacrossref.org&rft_dat=cr_pub++0pubmed. And Benefit Redemption Patterns in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Fiscal Year 2022, Castner et al., Mathematica for USDA FNS, May 2025

The failure of the federal government to fund SNAP benefits **threatens the financial sustainability of the 706 county retailers** who made sales to CalFresh recipients totaling \$16,299,089 in September. Table 2a – 2e demonstrate the CalFresh sales by District and by retailers for September 2025. The National Bureau of Economic Research found that food sales increased by 5.6% for the average grocery store in a week where SNAP benefits are issued compared to weeks when they are not issued. The effect is more pronounced in low-income areas. Food sales rise by 19.2% when SNAP benefits are issued in zip codes where more than 20% of households participate in SNAP³. Data from 2018 show that SNAP accounts for 8% - 10% of total expenditures on food for consumption at home nationwide and plays a large role in supporting the grocery retail sector.⁴ While most SNAP purchases occur at larger stores like Walmart and Costco, or grocery stores such as Raley's and Safeway, approximately 80% of SNAP-authorized retailers are small stores, including many locally owned businesses like private grocers, convenience stores, butchers, bakeries, and farm stands. SNAP is a key revenue source for these small businesses. In high-poverty areas, SNAP can account for a significant percentage of these retailers' total sales.⁵

The failure of the federal government to fund SNAP benefits **threatens the capacity of members of the Contra Costa County Food Collaborative** to meet the hunger needs of the community members who seek their services. Food Collaborative members report an increase in need ranging from 22% to 47% compared to last year. As illustrated in the table below, across all funding sources, the County has increased food security funding by a net \$3,575,837 from FY24/25 to FY25/26. This includes a net decrease of \$560,062 from federal and state funds and a net increase of \$4,135,899 in Measure X funds.

Partner	Category	Funding Source	FY24/25	FY25/26	Change
Food Bank of Contra Costa	Food Security	General Fund	\$53,667	\$53,667	\$0
Community Housing Development	Congregate	Federal/State	\$31,746	\$12,469	\$(19,277)
Meals on Wheels Diablo Region	Congregate	Federal/State	\$203,611	\$195,825	\$(7,786)
Trio	Congregate	Federal/State	\$836,759	\$818,710	\$(18,049)
Meals on Wheels Diablo Region	Home Delivered	Measure X	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$0
Meals on Wheels Diablo Region	Home Delivered	Federal/State	\$1,525,143	\$943,719	\$(581,424)
Meals on Wheels West Contra Costa	Home Delivered	Measure X	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$0
Meals on Wheels West Contra Costa	Home Delivered	Federal/State	\$350,487	\$159,558	\$(190,929)
J-Sei	Home Delivered	Federal/State	\$117,533	\$121,275	\$3,742
Trio	Home Delivered	Federal/State	\$3,418,450	\$3,672,111	\$253,661
Trio	Home Delivered	Measure X	\$0	\$500,000	\$500,000
Food Bank of Contra Costa	Food Security	Measure X	\$0	\$3,635,899	\$3,635,899
Total			\$7,037,396	\$10,613,233	\$3,575,837

³ Issuance and Incidence: SNAP Benefit Cycles and Grocery Prices, Goldin et al., National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2020, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28221/w28221.pdf

⁴ SNAP Boosts Retailers and Local Economies, Bolen & Wolkomir, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 5/28/2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-boosts-retailers-and-local-economies#:~:text=SNAP%20accounts%20for%20about%208,farmers%20markets%20%E2%80%94%20across%20the%20country>. Russell Redman, "SNAP Plays Outsized Role in Grocery Industry," Supermarket News, July 13, 2023, <https://www.supermarketnews.com/foodservice-retail/snap-plays-outsized-role-in-grocery-industry>

⁵ SNAP Boosts Retailers and Local Economies, Bolen & Wolkomir, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 5/28/2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-boosts-retailers-and-local-economies#:~:text=SNAP%20accounts%20for%20about%208,farmers%20markets%20%E2%80%94%20across%20the%20country>

Plan

EHSD proposes to activate two approaches to mitigate the threats to county households and businesses from the government shutdown and freeze on CalFresh benefits.

1. To provide food to CalFresh recipients who have and will miss their CalFresh benefit beginning November 1, EHSD will purchase from the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano 10,000 food boxes to serve 40,000 people for two weeks. EHSD and the Food Bank will begin distributing these boxes at EHSD locations on November 3, 2025. EHSD will use existing funding for this purchase. These food boxes will augment existing food distribution at EHSD pantries which are funded by local philanthropy.
2. To ensure that CalFresh households have continued resources to purchase food, EHSD will purchase debit cards and begin distributing them to November CalFresh-eligible households beginning the week of November 10, 2025.
 - a. To be successful, EHSD will utilize the Board declared county emergency to **activate and deploy EHSD employees as disaster workers**. To assist EHSD, other county departments may also activate disaster workers.
 - b. **Purchase and distribute debit cards** to provide November CalFresh-eligible households to enable their purchase of food. In developing this plan, EHSD considered various options related to cash transfer and distribution mechanisms (see Tables 3a. and 3b.) and consulted with various county functions and other counties. Based on this research, EHSD plans to implement the following:
 - Contract with a debit card operator to provide and operate up to 68,000 debit cards that EHSD will distribute to November CalFresh-eligible households.
 - The debit card operator will produce and deliver the requested number of unloaded debit cards with spending limited to grocery items.
 - The debit card operator will provide EHSD access to an application in which EHSD can load a desired amount to each card.
 - c. EHSD will **distribute debt cards** to November CalFresh-eligible households.
 - i. EHSD will open its four busiest EHSD lobbies, which each have good parking and/or good public transportation, for debit card distribution the week of November 10, 2025 for extended hours.
 - 1305 MacDonald Avenue, Richmond
 - 151 Linus Pauling Drive, Hercules
 - 400 Ellinwood Way, Pleasant Hill
 - 4545 Delta Fair Boulevard, Antioch
 - ii. For each customer, EHSD staff will:
 - Validate ID
 - Validate eligibility for November CalFresh
 - Assign a debit card
 - Load the debit card with a CalFresh benefit amount
 - Document the distribution and receipt of the debit card
 - If the customer is not a current CalFresh recipients, EHSD will accept an application

iii. Funds Issuance Steps

- During the activation of the card, EHSD will load two weeks of November benefits.
- EHSD will remotely load the third week of benefits if there is not yet a federal solution.
- EHSD will remotely load the fourth week of benefits if there is not yet a federal solution.

iv. Recipient rights

- The debit card is a one-time, discretionary county distribution. As such, CalFresh regulations do not apply. Recipients will have no right to appeal any decision related to the debit card or to report or receive reimbursement for a lost or stolen card.

v. EHSD plans to implement a different distribution process for special populations

- EHSD will partner with Contra Costa Health to issue debit cards at WIC offices.
- EHSD will hand-deliver and/or mail debit cards to current and former foster youth receiving EHSD Independent Living Services Program and IHSS consumers. EHSD may identify other populations that need a different distribution process.

F. EHSD will partner with the Contra Costa Sheriff's Office to plan for and ensure security of debit cards and safety in EHSD lobbies and grounds.

G. EHSD will demonstrate accountability by following County procedures and reporting results as follows:

- EHSD will follow relevant Contra Costa County Administrative Bulletins and other directives.
- EHSD will report progress and completion to the Board of Supervisors including but not limited to:
 - Number and percentage of debit cards issued
 - Number and percentage of total November eligible households who received debit cards
 - Total debit card expenditures
 - Documentation and resolution of all incidents and anomalies during distribution

H. EHSD will coordinate with Board offices and other county departments to widely communicate this plan using multiple media platforms.

Figure 1: Food spending and share of after-tax income spent on food across US households 2023

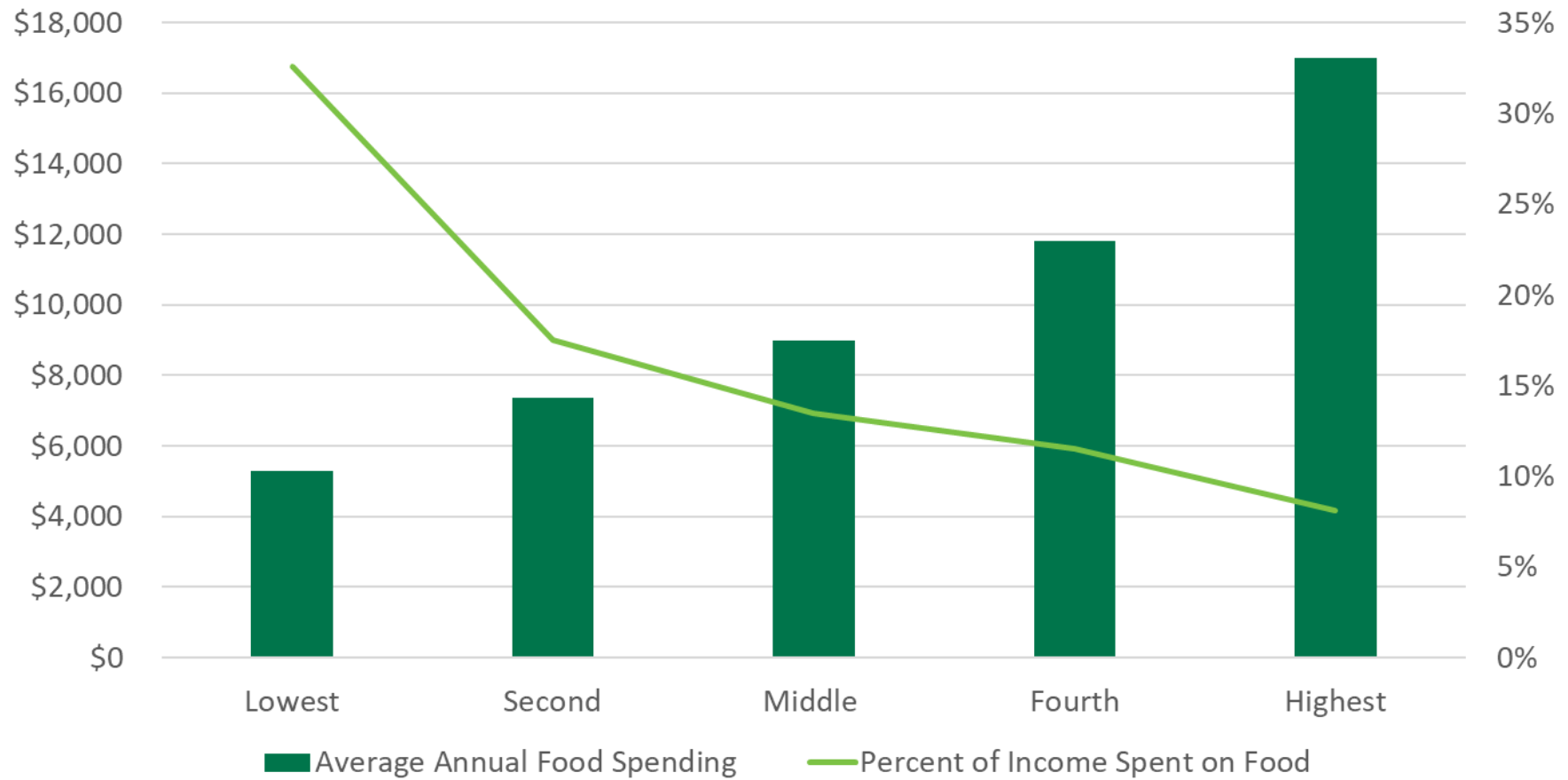


Table 1 CalFresh expenditures by District

District 1			District 2			District 3			District 4			District 5		
City	# Stores	Total Spending	City	# Stores	Total Spending	City	# Stores	Total Spending	City	# Stores	Total Spending	City	# Stores	Total Spending
Richmond	91	\$2,015,840	San Ramon	26	\$205,654	Brentwood	48	\$1,916,555	Concord	96	\$2,735,713	Pittsburg	68	\$2,180,243
San Pablo	46	\$1,266,337	Walnut Creek	18	\$197,629	Antioch	43	\$1,256,252	Pleasant Hill	21	\$340,093	Antioch	42	\$1,256,252
El Cerrito	20	\$356,497	Danville	16	\$180,999	Oakley	22	\$246,077	Walnut Creek	18	\$197,629	Bay Point	15	\$392,928
Pinole	9	\$302,242	Lafayette	10	\$72,711	Discovery Bay	2	\$51,566	Clayton	6	\$76,755	Martinez	31	\$339,785
El Sobrante	15	\$59,456	Orinda	2	\$21,985	Bethel Island	2	\$17,067	Crockett	2	\$4,920	Pinole	9	\$302,242
Kensington	1	\$555	Alamo	6	\$20,176	Byron	2	\$1,113				Hercules	6	\$230,487
			Moraga	6	\$19,970							Rodeo	4	\$27,148
												Pacheco	2	\$6,211
TOTAL	183	\$4,000,927	TOTAL	84	\$719,124	TOTAL	119	\$3,488,630	TOTAL	143	\$3,355,110	TOTAL	177	\$4,735,296

ⁱ Benefit Redemption Patterns in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Fiscal Year 2022, Castner et al., Mathematica for USDA FNS, May 2025