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From: Elizabeth Hernandez, PhD, Interim Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
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REPORT BACK ON NOTIFICATION PLAN TO ALERT CALFRESH RECIPIENTS OF SERVICE LEVEL CHANGES

On July 22, 2025 (8), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a notification plan to alert CalFresh recipients of changes as a result of H.R.1. As part of the action, the Board directed the plan to include a multi-channel communication system once policy details were formalized by the State of California.

The provisions of H.R.1 will go into effect over the next several years, with two significant changes to CalFresh coming in 2026. Specifically, these changes will require certain CalFresh recipients to report at least 80 hours of employment or eligible volunteer activities per month to maintain eligibility for food assistance and make certain lawfully present noncitizens ineligible for CalFresh benefits.

On September 22, 2025, County of San Diego (County) staff provided an update to the Board about the status of CalFresh policy details, which at the time had not been released by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). The previous memorandum described the County's approach to align the Notification Plan with the release of CDSS policy details, to avoid the risk of providing direction that may later conflict with official State communication. At the time, County staff were preparing the strategy to implement and mitigate the impacts of H.R. 1, and a County webpage was published informing the public that additional details were forthcoming and provided resources to support San Diego County residents find employment, training and volunteer activities.

On December 31, 2025, CDSS released policy details for upcoming changes to CalFresh. This memorandum summarizes the implementation details for CalFresh work requirements and noncitizen eligibility changes based on policy details released by CDSS. Included in the memorandum is an overview of the attached CalFresh Communication and Outreach Plan (Attachment A), as well as a

summary of other key provisions of H.R.1 and the State budget that will impact the County's social safety net programs.

The Communications and Outreach Plan is part of a broader coordinated County strategy to address the safety net service impacts of H.R. 1, intended to support eligible households remain enrolled in benefits and promote equitable access to essential services through: 1) Proactive Customer Service and Communication; 2) Statewide Engagement and Advocacy; 3) Data, AI and Technology Solutions; 4) Workforce Capacity and Administrative Readiness; and 5) Cross-Sector and Community Partnerships.

Implementation Details
On December 31, 2025, CDSS released formal policy guidance via two All-County Letters (ACL) detailing how counties will need to implement new noncitizen eligibility criteria and reinstate work requirements for CalFresh. ACLs are the mechanism for the State to formally provide policy implementation details including effective dates or when work requirements or other eligibility criteria should be verified (e.g., during annual or semi-annual reviews).

Noncitizen Eligibility
Starting on April 1, 2026, counties will evaluate CalFresh applications and renewals under new rules that remove eligibility for certain groups of lawfully present noncitizens such as asylees and refugees. Eligibility will be limited to individuals who are:

- A United States (U.S.) citizen;
- A U.S. national;
- A Lawful Permanent Resident;
- A Cuban and Haitian Entrant; or,
- An individual who resides in the US in accordance with a Compact of Free Association agreement.

Households already receiving CalFresh will be evaluated under the new provision at their next annual recertification starting in April. County staff estimate that this change could lead to a loss of CalFresh benefits for approximately 13,000 current San Diego County CalFresh customers over the next year. The full list of impacted populations can be found on the County CalFresh webpage at https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/ssp/calfresh-medical-work-requirements/calfresh-work-requirements.html.

Work Requirements
Starting on June 1, 2026, new or renewing CalFresh "Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)" will have to meet work requirements to get or maintain eligibility for benefits. These work requirements generally apply to CalFresh adults age 18-64. Various exemptions County staff will screen for include if a new or renewing customer is:

- Physically or mentally unfit for employment;
- A parent of, or responsible for the care of, a dependent child under the age of 14;
- Meeting the work requirement for another program (such as CalWORKs);
- Pregnant; or,
- Disabled

In order to meet CalFresh work requirements, ABAWDs who do not meet an exemption must do one or more of the following:

- Work at least 20 hours per week or 80 hours per month
- Participate in other qualifying work activities for at least 20 hours per week (80 hours averaged monthly), including:
    - Community service or volunteer work
    - A Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act program
    - Qualifying CalFresh Employment & Training components
    - A program under Section 236 of the Trade Act of 1974

Starting in June 2026, households already receiving CalFresh will be evaluated under these rules at their next annual recertification. Based on December 2025 enrollment, County staff estimate that approximately 93,500 individuals will be subject to the ABAWD work requirement during the first year of implementation.

ABAWDs who do not meet the work requirement will be subject to a time limit for their CalFresh benefits, where they can only receive 3 months of benefits in a 3-year period. In practice this means that if a CalFresh customer has a renewal due in June 2026, and they do not meet an exemption or the work requirement, they can only receive CalFresh through August 2026 before being discontinued. More information about the change can be found on the County's CalFresh Eligibility Changes webpage.

Some policy details have yet to be released by CDSS, such as specific statewide automations that will support County eligibility workers in screening for exemptions and specific forms needed to verify work or volunteer requirements; however the County's implementation planning is fully underway and the information above has been confirmed and will be distributed through a robust CalFresh Communication and Outreach Plan.

CalFresh Communication and Outreach Plan

To help eligible households maintain their CalFresh benefits in the midst of these eligibility changes, Health and Human Services Agency, Self-Sufficiency Services (SSS), in collaboration with the County Communications Office, County departments, and Board offices developed a multilingual communication strategy in the form of a Communications and Outreach Plan (Attachment A).

Implementation of the plan is already underway and will provide clear, actionable guidance and reach impacted households, prospective applicants, and key stakeholders through direct and broad outreach channels. Guided by the principles of clarity, equity, consistency, and accessibility, messaging will emphasize the importance of responding to communication from the County and focus on upcoming CalFresh policy changes, eligibility impacts, and available support resources from the County and partners. The Communications and Outreach Plan builds on tools that SSS uses to remind customers about upcoming deadlines and incorporates additional strategies to leverage partnerships and outreach staff to maximize reach. Plain language flyers have been developed that will be widely distributed to community members and made available as part of an outreach toolkit.

The Communications and Outreach Plan also includes active engagement with stakeholders to ensure timely, accurate, and widespread dissemination of CalFresh policy changes. SSS is coordinating with Board Offices, the Social Services Advisory Board, and a broad network of community-based

organizations, including food banks, legal aid groups, and healthcare providers, to share resource materials, amplify messaging, and gather continuous input. In addition, outreach through trusted community networks, including the *Live Well San Diego* Sectors and Community Leadership Teams, will ensure broad and timely reach. Ongoing engagement will continue through Board Office and stakeholder briefings, partner convenings, and regular meetings with key groups to align outreach and ensure community readiness.

Other Safety Net Changes
Subsequent impacts to the CalFresh and the Medi-Cal programs related to H.R. 1 and the State budget are expected to take effect over the next several years. Specifically, changes to full-scope Medi-Cal eligibility for current recipients with "Unsatisfactory Immigration Status" are anticipated to begin in October 2026, and work requirements and semi-annual recertifications for Medi-Cal recipients are anticipated to begin in January 2027. Formal guidance on these Medi-Cal changes has not been released by the State. When the guidance is released, the County will expand on this existing Communications and Outreach Plan to implement widespread communication strategies in alignment with the State to maximize continuity of coverage for recipients. Additional information about other changes related to H.R. 1 and the State budget can be found on the County's website at https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/ssp/calfresh-medical-work-requirements.html.

For any questions or concerns, please contact Alberto Banuelos, Ph.D., Interim Director, Self-Sufficiency Services, via phone at (619) 338-2220 or email at Alberto.Banuelos@sdcounty.ca.gov.

Respectfully,

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Attachment A – CalFresh Communications and Outreach Plan

cc: Ebony N. Shelton, Chief Administrative Officer
Caroline Smith, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
Andrew Potter, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

Communications & Outreach Plan
Upcoming CalFresh Changes in San Diego County

Purpose

This communications and outreach plan outlines a coordinated approach for the County of San Diego to proactively inform and engage customers, community members, partners, and media about upcoming changes to CalFresh. The plan is designed to ensure accurate understanding, minimize confusion, support continued enrollment and access to food assistance benefits, and promote consistent messaging countywide. Strategies and actions are focused on the initial changes to the CalFresh program and will be adapted to include Medi-Cal as needed.

This plan is intended to be updated as final implementation details are confirmed and activities are evaluated on an ongoing basis.

Objectives

- Support households in maintaining benefits where eligible
- Increase awareness of upcoming CalFresh work requirements and non-citizen eligibility changes
- Clearly explain what is changing, when changes take effect, and who may be impacted
- Equip community partners, media, and leaders with accurate and consistent information
- Reduce misinformation and unnecessary disruption to benefits
- Promote alternate food resources for those who will no longer be CalFresh eligible

Guiding Principles

- **Clarity:** Use plain language and avoid jargon
- **Equity:** Provide multilingual, culturally responsive outreach
- **Consistency:** Align messages across the state, County departments and partners
- **Accessibility:** Share information through multiple trusted channels

Key Messages

- “Some CalFresh requirements are changing, and help is available.”
- “Some households may see changes to benefit amounts or eligibility requirements.”
- “Most people will continue to qualify for CalFresh.”
- “The County of San Diego and our partners are here to help community members understand next steps and provide links to additional resources for those who need them.”

Customer Outreach

Audience: Current CalFresh households and potentially eligible San Diego County community members

Strategies:

- Use simple, reassuring language to ensure customers understand how changes may affect them
- Communicate early and often through trusted channels to reduce fear and benefit interruptions
- Emphasize local help and resources
- Encourage timely action when required
- Focus on phased approach for those impacted with special emphasis on hard-to-reach populations

Tactics:

- Direct mail and/or electronic notices
- Text, robocall and email alerts when available
- Updated call center scripts and frontline staff talking points
- Scripts and multi-lingual materials for Community Health Worker outreach
- Identify spaces and access points for focused outreach

Sample Customer Messaging:

- "Important CalFresh updates are coming, and help is available. Some households may see changes to their benefits. Check your mail and stay connected with the County of San Diego so you don't miss important information."
- "Most people will still qualify for CalFresh. If you have questions or need help, call the Access line, visit a local Family Resource Center or check online through your BenefitsCal portal."
- "Now is a great time to update your contact information by calling the Access line, visiting a local Family Resource Center or online at your BenefitsCal portal."

Organizational Outreach

Audience: Community-based organizations, schools, food banks, advocacy groups, healthcare providers, and service partners with a special focus on vulnerable populations (i.e. older adults, veterans, people experiencing homelessness and youth aging out of foster care).

Strategies:

- Expand outreach through trusted community networks, including the *Live Well San Diego* Sectors
- Early and ongoing partner engagement to ensure partners understand changes and can accurately support customers
- Provide clear, ready-to-use materials
- Strengthen access to work, training, and volunteer opportunities

Tactics:

- Leverage existing collaborations with food security partners
- Host telebriefings for partners and specific *Live Well San Diego* Sectors including: Community Based Organizations, Faith Based Organizations, Rural, Business, Youth, Education, Healthcare, Homeless Service Providers, and Veterans.
- Create toolkits with fact sheets, FAQs, and sample social media posts
- Provide updates and receive feedback through newsletters, webpage, Virtual Connection Hub and social media channels
- Engage Community Collaboratives, schools and other organizations for presentations/informational updates

Media Outreach

Audience: San Diego County print, digital, radio, television, and ethnic media outlets; social media, including Meta and Google platforms

Strategies:

- Support accurate and timely reporting on CalFresh changes
- Use broad and varied media approaches for community awareness and education
- Emphasize local impact and County/partner resources and support

Tactics:

- County News Center stories ahead of implementation
- Media briefings with County subject-matter experts
- Social media posts, Meta and Google ads etc.
- Short explainer videos
- Updates to the County webpages

Communication & Outreach Plan Highlights

Timeline	Action
February 2026	Create outreach materials and update County website
March	90-Day formal Customer Notification process begins for CalFresh Able Bodied Adults Without Dependent (ABAWD) households with annual renewals in June • Notify adult heads of household via text message of upcoming work requirements
March	Customer Notification (text, robocalls) for customers potentially impacted by non-citizen eligibility changes
March	Publish County News Center (CNC) article announcing policy changes and text message campaign
March	Launch paid social media and Google campaign
March	Go live with Access Call Center queue for support with questions about CalFresh work requirements
March-June	Ramp up community outreach and engagement • Focused events with Live Well Mobile Office • Leverage existing community outreach teams
March-June	Begin telebriefing/webinar and in-person presentation series • Host webinars with key partners • Presentations at *Live Well San Diego* Community Leadership Teams, community partner meetings, etc.
May	Mail Annual Renewal CalFresh Packets to recipients with renewal due in June 2026 • Include an insert in packet with work requirement and CalFresh Employment & Training information
June	Focused Robocalls to inform recipients with renewals due in June of work requirements
June	Send text message and Robocall reminder to submit June Annual Renewal
June	Mail Annual Renewal CalFresh Packets to recipients with reporting due in July 2026
July and ongoing	Recipient-specific actions above will continue on a monthly cycle depending on date of customer Annual Renewal (mail packet, robocall, text messages, reminders, etc.)

Outreach Toolkit Example





