

CALIFORNIA CALFRESH BENEFITS

A Plain-Language Navigation Guide

California's Name for the Federal SNAP (Food Stamps) Program

For Individuals, Families, and Nonprofits Serving Vulnerable Populations | Updated May 2026

What This Guide Covers

Eligibility rules • 200% FPL income limits • CFAP state program for immigrants • June 2026 ABAWD work changes • Student eligibility expansion • Step-by-step application • Public charge guidance • Why people lose benefits • Key contacts

Major 2026 Changes: Three Active Shifts in California CalFresh

California CalFresh is undergoing three significant changes in 2026, all at different dates:

April 1, 2026: Federal eligibility eliminated for most lawfully present non-LPR immigrants (refugees, asylees, parolees, and others) under the OBBBA. Many of these individuals transition automatically to California's state-funded CFAP program.

June 1, 2026: California's statewide ABAWD waiver expired January 31, 2026. Full ABAWD work requirement enforcement begins June 1, 2026 for able-bodied adults without dependents ages 18–64.

July 1, 2026: Expanded student eligibility takes effect for most public college students in California under the LPIE (Low-Income Public Institution of Education) exemption.

This guide reflects rules as of May 2026. Verify current rules at benefitscal.com or cdss.ca.gov/calfresh.

Section 1: What Is CalFresh?

CalFresh is California's name for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. It is administered by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) through local county Human Services agencies. Benefits are issued monthly through a California EBT card accepted at authorized grocery stores, farmers markets, and major online retailers including Amazon, Walmart, and Safeway.

Approximately 5 to 5.5 million Californians receive CalFresh each month, making it one of the largest food assistance programs in the United States. California operates one of the most accessible CalFresh programs in the country, with a 200% FPL income threshold, no asset test

for most households, a state-funded backup program for immigrants, and significantly expanded student eligibility.

✓ **California CalFresh: Key Advantages at a Glance**

- 200% FPL gross income limit — the highest in the continental United States
- No asset test for most households — savings, vehicles, and investments are not counted
- California Food Assistance Program (CFAP): state-funded backup for immigrants who lose federal CalFresh eligibility
- No drug felony ban — people with any conviction are fully eligible if income-eligible
- Expanded student eligibility: most California public college students now qualify
- Expedited benefits within 3 days for qualifying households (faster than the federal 7-day standard)
- Public charge protection: CalFresh participation does NOT affect immigration status for most applicants
- County-by-county ABAWD waivers may exempt your area from work requirements — always check

Section 2: Eligibility Requirements

2.1 Residency

You must currently reside in California. There is no minimum residency period. You do not need a permanent address — a shelter address, transitional housing address, or a statement from a non-relative confirming your location can satisfy the requirement. Your application is handled by the county Human Services agency in the county where you currently live. Each county administers its own CalFresh office, though statewide policy is set by CDSS.

2.2 Citizenship and Immigration Status — Federal CalFresh

The following individuals are generally eligible for federal CalFresh:

- U.S. citizens (born or naturalized)
- Lawful Permanent Residents (Green Card holders) — California waives the standard 5-year wait for most LPRs
- Certain refugees, asylees, Special Immigrant Visa holders (SIVs), Cuban and Haitian Entrants, and Afghan parolees — note: OBBBA changes affected many of these categories; see below
- U/T-Visa holders (crime victims and trafficking survivors)
- U.S.-born children in mixed-status households always qualify, regardless of parents' status

⚠ April 1, 2026 Change: Federal CalFresh Eligibility Narrowed for Immigrants

Effective April 1, 2026, the OBBBA eliminated federal CalFresh eligibility for most lawfully present non-LPR immigrants, including refugees, asylees, certain parolees, trafficking survivors, and other categories that previously qualified. This change affects new applications starting April 1 and existing recipients at their next recertification.

IMPORTANT: Many individuals losing federal CalFresh eligibility will be automatically evaluated for California’s state-funded CFAP program at the same time — no separate application needed. The same CalFresh application covers CFAP. See Section 6.1 for full CFAP details.

✓ Public Charge Protection — Applying for CalFresh Is Safe for Most Immigrants

Applying for CalFresh (including CFAP) does NOT create a public charge problem for most immigrants. The federal public charge rule applies primarily to certain visa and green card applications. CalFresh was explicitly removed from public charge considerations by federal guidance, and state-funded CFAP has never been part of it. If you have specific immigration concerns, consult an immigration attorney before applying — but for the vast majority of CalFresh applicants, there is no risk to immigration status.

2.3 Household Composition

Your CalFresh household includes everyone who lives together and regularly purchases and prepares food together. You may qualify as a separate CalFresh household even while living with others, unless you are a spouse or a parent with children under age 22, in which case you are counted together. College students living with parents but buying food separately may form their own household.

2.4 Income Limits — California’s 200% FPL BBCE

California uses Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level — the highest gross income threshold of any state in the continental United States. Most households must pass both a gross income test and a net income test.

Exception: Households where at least one member is age 60+ or receives disability income have NO gross income limit — only the net income test applies. Additionally, if all members of a household receive SSI, a slightly different 165% FPL gross limit applies.

California CalFresh Income Limits and Maximum Benefits (FY 2026, Oct. 1, 2025 – Sept. 30, 2026)

| HH Size | Gross Limit(200% FPL) | Elderly/Disabled Gross Limit | Net Limit(100% FPL) | Max Monthly Benefit |
|---------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | \$2,510 | No limit* | \$1,255 | \$292 |

| HH Size | Gross Limit(200% FPL) | Elderly/DisabledGross Limit | Net Limit(100% FPL) | Max MonthlyBenefit |
|---------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 2 | \$3,398 | No limit* | \$1,699 | \$536 |
| 3 | \$4,287 | No limit* | \$2,144 | \$766 |
| 4 | \$5,178 | No limit* | \$2,589 | \$994 |
| 5 | \$6,067 | No limit* | \$3,034 | \$1,155 |
| 6 | \$6,956 | No limit* | \$3,478 | \$1,386 |
| 7 | \$7,845 | No limit* | \$3,923 | \$1,532 |
| 8+ | +\$889/person | No limit* | +\$445/person | +\$177/person |

* Elderly/disabled households (where at least one member is 60+ or disabled) have no gross income limit. Only the net income limit applies. Exception: if all members receive SSI, a 165% FPL gross limit applies. Income limits update each October 1.

How Net Income Is Calculated

Net income = gross income minus approved deductions. The lower your net income, the higher your monthly benefit. California allows the following deductions:

- 20% earned income deduction — automatically applied to all wages and self-employment income
- Standard deduction: varies by household size (approximately \$204–\$291 for most households)
- Excess shelter deduction: rent/mortgage plus utilities exceeding 50% of net income after other deductions (capped at \$744/month for standard households; uncapped for elderly/disabled households)
- Standard Utility Allowance (SUA): a set allowance for utility costs — using the SUA instead of actual utility bills often results in a larger deduction
- Dependent care deduction: childcare or adult care costs paid while working, job searching, or in training
- Medical expense deduction: out-of-pocket costs over \$35/month for members 60+ or with a qualifying disability (uncapped for elderly/disabled households)
- Child support deduction: legally obligated child support paid to someone outside the household

Tip: The Standard Utility Allowance May Be Worth More Than Your Actual Bills

California allows households to use the Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) instead of reporting actual utility costs. In many cases, particularly in urban California where energy costs are high, the SUA is larger than actual bills and therefore produces a bigger deduction. Ask your county worker which option produces the better result for your household.

2.5 Asset Limits

For most California households, there is NO asset test. Under BBCE, savings accounts, vehicles, stocks, and other assets are not counted or verified.

Exception: Households where all members are elderly or disabled AND whose income exceeds the 200% FPL gross limit face a \$4,250 asset limit on countable assets. Primary homes, personal property, most vehicles, and retirement accounts are always exempt.

Section 3: Work Requirements — June 2026 Changes

California's ABAWD work requirements are in a significant transition in 2026. Understanding the current rules — and whether your county has a waiver — is critical for anyone without dependents.

3.1 Standard Work Requirements (All Adults 16–59)

All able-bodied adults between ages 16 and 59 must meet at least one of the following:

- Be employed (any number of hours)
- Be registered for work and participating in CalFresh Employment and Training (E&T)
- Participate in an approved employment or training program through EDD or another approved provider
- Not have voluntarily quit a job without good cause or reduced hours below 30/week

3.2 ABAWD Rules — New Enforcement Starting June 1, 2026

California's statewide ABAWD waiver expired January 31, 2026. Full enforcement of the 3-month time limit begins June 1, 2026. This is one of the most significant CalFresh changes in recent California history, affecting an estimated 100,000+ current recipients.

Who Is an ABAWD in California?

1. Between ages 18 and 64 (under OBBBA expansion; previously 18–54)
2. Not disabled (as documented)
3. Does not have a dependent child living in the same household
4. Not otherwise exempt from general work requirements

ABAWDs must complete at least 80 hours per month (20 hours/week) of qualifying activity:

- Employment (paid work)
- Volunteering or community service
- Job training or approved vocational program

- Participation in CalFresh Employment & Training (E&T) through your county
- Participation in approved work programs through California’s Employment Development Department (EDD)

Without meeting this requirement, ABAWDs can only receive CalFresh for 3 months in any 36-month period.

3.3 County-Level ABAWD Waivers — The Most Important Question to Ask

Even with the statewide waiver expired, individual California counties may still have active ABAWD waivers based on local unemployment data. If your county has a current waiver, ABAWDs in that county are NOT subject to the 3-month time limit.

 **Before Assuming Work Rules Apply to You: Check Your County**

This is the single most important step for ABAWDs in California. Contact your county Human Services agency or check benefitscal.com to determine whether your county currently has an active ABAWD waiver. Your county CalFresh worker is required to tell you whether a waiver applies in your area. A waiver in your county means you do not face the 3-month time limit, regardless of work hours.

Counties with historically higher unemployment rates — including many in the Central Valley and rural Northern California — are more likely to have waivers. Urban counties like Los Angeles and San Francisco may or may not have waivers at any given time. Do not assume; verify.

3.4 Exemptions from ABAWD Requirements

The following individuals are exempt from ABAWD time limits regardless of county waiver status:

- Physically or mentally unfit for employment (documented by a physician, licensed clinical social worker, or similar professional)
- Pregnant
- Responsible for a dependent child living in the same household
- Enrolled at least half-time in a recognized school, training program, or institution of higher education — with important new rules for college students; see Section 6.3
- Participating in a drug or alcohol treatment or rehabilitation program
- Age 15 or younger, or 65 or older
- Recently released from an institution (incarceration or psychiatric facility)
- Survivors of domestic violence
- Experiencing homelessness (may qualify under “unfit for employment” — ask your county worker)

3.5 CalFresh Employment & Training (E&T)

All CalFresh recipients must register for work and participate in CalFresh E&T unless otherwise exempt. The E&T program provides:

- Job search assistance and employment coaching
- Vocational training and job skills programs
- GED and basic education classes
- Internships and work experience
- Reimbursements for transportation and other work-related expenses in many counties

Participation in CalFresh E&T counts toward the ABAWD 80-hour monthly requirement. Contact your county CalFresh office to enroll.

3.6 How to Document Work or an Exemption

You must report work activity or exemption status to your county CalFresh office. This can be done:

- Online through BenefitsCal.com
- Online through GetCalFresh.org (which connects to BenefitsCal)
- By phone to your county CalFresh office
- In person at your county Human Services office

Tip: Claim Exemptions in Writing, Before Your Benefits Are Cut

If you believe you qualify for any exemption, submit documentation before your benefit period runs out. Your county cannot retroactively restore months lost due to non-compliance. A letter from a treating physician, psychiatrist, licensed social worker, domestic violence advocate, shelter staff, or treatment provider describing your situation serves as supporting documentation. Verbal claims alone are generally not sufficient.

Section 4: Required Documents

California has streamlined its document requirements compared to many states. While verification is required, the online portals (BenefitsCal and GetCalFresh) guide applicants through what is needed and allow documents to be uploaded directly.

4.1 Always Required

- Proof of Identity: Driver's license, state-issued ID, passport, birth certificate, or any government-issued photo ID (including Tribal IDs and matricula consular for CFAP applicants)

- Social Security Number (SSN): For each household member applying for federal CalFresh. CFAP applicants who are not eligible for SSNs may use other identification
- Proof of California Residency: Utility bill, lease or rental agreement, official mail with your name and address, or a signed statement from a non-relative confirming your location (including their address and phone number)

4.2 Income Verification

- Pay stubs from the last 30 days (for employed applicants)
- Most recent W-2, 1099, or tax return (for self-employment income)
- Award letter or benefit statement for Social Security, SSI, unemployment, or other unearned income
- Documentation of child support received or paid
- Documentation of any other income source (pension, workers' compensation, rental income)

4.3 Deduction Documentation (Strongly Recommended)

These documents are not required to apply but significantly increase your monthly benefit:

- Rent or mortgage statement
- Utility bills — or you may simply claim the Standard Utility Allowance without documentation (ask your worker which is higher)
- Childcare or dependent care receipts and provider information
- Medical bills for members 60+ or with disabilities
- Court documentation of child support payments you make outside the household

4.4 Situation-Specific Documents

- Non-citizens (federal CalFresh): Immigration documents — Green Card, refugee resettlement paperwork, visa documentation
- Non-citizens (CFAP): Any government-issued ID that confirms identity; immigration documents if available, but not required for all CFAP categories
- Students: Enrollment verification, class schedule, and documentation of any applicable exemption (employment records, work-study confirmation, childcare situation)
- Disabled individuals: Physician's letter, SSI award letter, or medical documentation for work exemptions and medical deductions
- Recently incarcerated: Release paperwork from the facility



Tip: Apply Online and Upload Documents Digitally

BenefitsCal.com and GetCalFresh.org both allow document uploads directly in the application. This is significantly faster than mailing or faxing documents and makes it easy to establish your

application date quickly. Apply first, upload documents as you gather them — your application date (which determines when benefits begin) is set the day you submit the initial application, not when you finish uploading.

Section 5: Step-by-Step Application Process

Step 1: Check Your Eligibility

Before applying, get a quick estimate. You can:

- Use the GetCalFresh screener at getcalfresh.org — takes about 10 minutes and provides an estimate
- Use BenefitsCal.com’s eligibility calculator
- Call 1-877-847-3663 (statewide CalFresh helpline) to speak with a representative
- Visit your county Human Services agency in person
- Contact a local food bank or nonprofit — many offer CalFresh application assistance

Step 2: Choose Your Application Method

| Method | How / Contact / Notes |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| BenefitsCal.com (Official Portal) | benefitscal.com — California’s official portal. Create an account, complete the application, upload documents, track your case, and manage renewals. Applications automatically routed to your county. Available 24/7. |
| GetCalFresh.org (Simplified Portal) | getcalfresh.org — A simplified, mobile-friendly application that connects directly to BenefitsCal. Recommended for first-time applicants or those who find BenefitsCal complex. Same application date and result. |
| By Phone | Call 1-877-847-3663 (statewide helpline) or your county Human Services office directly. Staff can take your application by phone or answer eligibility questions. |
| In Person | Visit your county Human Services office. Find your county at cdss.ca.gov/county-offices . Best for complex situations or same-day expedited screening requests. Bring all documents. |
| By Mail or Fax | Request a paper application by phone or download from your county’s website. Mail or fax to your county office. Slower; confirm receipt and note your application date. |

Step 3: Complete the Application

The application will ask for:

- Names, dates of birth, and Social Security Numbers for all household members (SSNs not required for CFAP applicants)
- Current address and residency information
- Income sources for all household members
- Monthly expenses: rent, utilities, childcare, medical costs
- Citizenship and immigration status for each household member
- Work history, current employment, and ABAWD work activity (if applicable)
- Any existing program participation (Medi-Cal, SSI, CalWORKs, unemployment)
- Student enrollment status (if applicable)

Step 4: Attend Your Interview

After submitting your application, your county will schedule a mandatory interview. In California, this is typically conducted by phone, though in-person interviews may be required in some counties or situations.

Tip: Do Not Miss Your Interview

Missing the CalFresh interview is the single most common reason applications are denied in California. If you cannot make the scheduled time, contact your county office immediately to reschedule. Have your Social Security Number, household member names, and income information available when the caseworker calls. Missing without rescheduling requires a new application and resets your application date.

Step 5: Provide Requested Verification

After the interview, your county may request additional documents. You will receive a written notice specifying what is needed and the deadline. Submit documents through BenefitsCal.com, GetCalFresh.org, by phone, in person, or by fax to your county office.

Step 6: Receive a Decision

California must process standard applications within 30 days of receipt. If approved, you will receive an EBT card by mail. Benefits are loaded monthly to your card. Your California EBT card works at authorized retailers nationwide.

If denied, you have the right to request a State Hearing (appeal) within 90 days. See Section 7.

Emergency / Expedited Processing — California’s 3-Day Standard

California issues expedited CalFresh benefits within 3 calendar days — faster than the federal 7-day standard. You may qualify if:

- Gross monthly income is less than \$150 AND liquid assets (cash, checking/savings) are less than \$100
- Combined monthly income and liquid assets are less than your monthly rent/mortgage plus utilities
- You are a migrant or seasonal farmworker with liquid assets under \$100

Ask specifically about expedited processing when you apply. If applying in person at your county office, request expedited screening at the front desk. Proof of identity is required even for expedited applications; other documents can be submitted afterward.

Section 6: Special Situations — California’s Unique Protections

6.1 California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) — For Immigrants Losing Federal Eligibility

CFAP is California’s state-funded food assistance program that provides benefits equivalent to federal CalFresh to immigrants who do not qualify for federal benefits solely because of their immigration status. This is California’s most significant and distinctive SNAP-related feature.

Who Is Eligible for CFAP?

CFAP covers immigrants who are ineligible for federal CalFresh only because of their immigration status under the 1996 federal welfare reform law. Examples include:

1. Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) who have not yet met the 5-year U.S. residency requirement
2. Parolees (paroled into the U.S. for any duration as of June 1, 2026; previously required at least 1 year)
3. Conditional entrants
4. Battered or abused noncitizens
5. U-Visa applicants (crime victims) and T-Visa applicants (trafficking survivors) ineligible for federal CalFresh
6. Refugees, asylees, and others who lost federal CalFresh eligibility under OBBBA changes (April 1, 2026) — if ineligible solely due to immigration status

Note: Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for federal CalFresh. The CFAP expansion to include all income-eligible Californians age 55+ regardless of immigration status is anticipated to be implemented October 1, 2027.

CFAP provides the same monthly benefit amounts as federal CalFresh. There is NO separate CFAP application — the standard CalFresh application covers both. If you lose federal CalFresh

eligibility due to immigration status, your county worker is required to automatically evaluate you for CFAP. CFAP benefits are state-funded and are not part of the public charge determination.

For Nonprofits: Help Clients Understand the Automatic CFAP Transition

Many immigrants who lost federal CalFresh on April 1, 2026 may not know they were automatically evaluated for CFAP at their next recertification. If you are working with non-citizen clients who lost CalFresh benefits, encourage them to check their recertification notice carefully — it should indicate whether CFAP was approved. If they were denied both, contact Legal Aid organizations listed in Section 8 for a review of the denial.

6.2 Experiencing Homelessness

You do not need a permanent address to apply for CalFresh in California. Your county Human Services office accepts:

- A shelter address (with shelter staff confirmation)
- A transitional or temporary housing address
- A signed statement from a non-relative (a case manager, outreach worker, church staff, or neighbor) confirming your location, with their address and phone number

If you cannot receive mail, ask a shelter, a nonprofit, or a trusted community contact if they can receive county correspondence on your behalf. Many counties offer specialized CalFresh outreach for people experiencing homelessness — dial 211 to find local resources.

People experiencing homelessness may also qualify for the CalFresh restaurant meals program in participating counties, which allows EBT card use at certain approved restaurants and prepared food vendors. Ask your county worker if this program is available in your area.

6.3 College Students — Significantly Expanded Eligibility in 2026

California has dramatically expanded CalFresh eligibility for college students. Starting July 1, 2026, most public college students gain automatic exemption from the standard student restrictions through the Low-Income Public Institution of Education (LPIE) exemption.

July 1, 2026: LPIE Exemption — Most Public College Students Now Automatically Qualify

If you are enrolled at least half-time at a UC, CSU, or California Community College, you automatically qualify for the LPIE exemption as of July 1, 2026. Any program at a California public college now qualifies as “increasing employability.” This removes most of the barriers that previously prevented community college students from receiving CalFresh.

You must still meet income requirements and not have a meal plan providing more than 10.5 meals per week. You do NOT need to be working. If you are age 50 or older, student rules do not apply to you at all — you follow standard CalFresh eligibility only.

Other student exemptions that also qualify (for students who do not meet the LPIE criteria):

- Working 20 or more hours per week (average 80 hours/month)
- Participating in a federal or state work-study program
- Caring for a dependent child under age 6
- Caring for a dependent child ages 6–11 when adequate childcare is unavailable
- Receiving CalWORKs (TANF) benefits
- Enrolled in an approved EOPS (Extended Opportunity Programs and Services) program at a community college

6.4 People With Disabilities or Elderly Household Members

Households where at least one member is age 60+ or has a documented disability qualify under significantly more favorable rules:

- No gross income test — only the net income limit at 100% FPL applies
- No cap on the shelter deduction — all rent and utility costs can be deducted
- Medical expense deduction with no cap for out-of-pocket costs over \$35/month
- Higher asset limit (\$4,250) if income exceeds 200% FPL

A formal Social Security disability determination is not required to claim a work exemption. A letter from a treating physician or licensed clinical social worker describing a condition that limits employment is generally sufficient.

6.5 Mixed-Status Households

In households where some members are U.S. citizens or eligible non-citizens and others are not, the eligible members may still receive CalFresh. The ineligible members' income is "prorated" — only a portion counts toward the eligible members' household income calculation, which means more of the household's income is excluded. This is more favorable than simply counting all household income, and it helps mixed-status families receive higher benefits than many expect.

6.6 Restaurant Meals Program

Several California counties participate in the CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program, which allows EBT card use at approved restaurants and food vendors — primarily to serve elderly, disabled, and homeless CalFresh recipients who may not have cooking facilities. Participating restaurants agree to serve SNAP-eligible meals at approved prices. Contact your county Human Services office to ask whether the Restaurant Meals Program is available in your county.

6.7 Drug Convictions

California has no drug felony ban. Individuals with any drug-related conviction are fully eligible for CalFresh if they meet income and other eligibility requirements. No additional conditions, treatment requirements, or drug testing apply.

Section 7: Why People Lose Benefits — and How to Avoid It

Most CalFresh recipients who lose benefits in California lose them because of procedural failures, not income changes. The June 2026 ABAWD work requirement rollout is expected to be the largest source of new terminations.

The Most Common Reasons CalFresh Benefits Are Cut Off in California

1. Missing the recertification (renewal) deadline

CalFresh is not permanent. Certification periods are typically 6–12 months for most households (longer for some elderly/disabled households). Your county sends a renewal notice before your period ends. Prevention: Set a personal calendar reminder 60 days before your certification end date. Check BenefitsCal.com monthly. Confirm your mailing address is current.

2. Failing the ABAWD work requirement after June 1, 2026

California's statewide ABAWD waiver expired. Starting June 1, 2026, ABAWDs who do not work 80 hours/month and have not claimed a valid exemption or county waiver will be cut off after 3 months. Prevention: Immediately check whether your county has an active waiver (contact your county office). If not, verify whether any exemption applies to you and document it in writing. Enroll in CalFresh E&T if needed.

3. Missing the interview or not responding to county notices

Your county sends notices through mail and BenefitsCal.com. Not responding leads to denial or case closure. Prevention: Keep your mailing address and phone number current in BenefitsCal. Check your account regularly. If you move, update your address immediately.

4. Failure to report changes in income or household composition

California requires you to report within 10 days when your gross income exceeds 130% FPL. Failure to report income increases above this threshold can result in overpayments that your county will attempt to recoup. Report changes through BenefitsCal.com or by contacting your county.

5. Immigration status changes and the April 2026 OBBBA cuts

Many non-citizen CalFresh recipients lost federal eligibility effective April 1, 2026. If you are a non-citizen who received a denial or termination notice, check immediately whether CFAP applies to you. Your county is required to evaluate you for CFAP automatically, but follow up if you did not receive a CFAP determination.

Your Right to a State Hearing (Appeal)

If your county denies your application, reduces your benefits, or closes your case, you have the right to request a California State Hearing (appeal). Key points:

- You must request the hearing within 90 days of the date on your notice
- If you request a hearing within 10 days of a notice reducing or terminating benefits, your benefits may continue at the previous level during the review period
- Hearings are typically conducted by phone
- You may represent yourself or have an advocate, legal aid attorney, or trusted person assist you

To request a State Hearing, contact your county Human Services office in person, by phone, or in writing. You can also request a hearing directly through BenefitsCal.com. For free legal assistance, contact a legal aid organization listed in Section 8.

Section 8: Key Contacts and Resources

| Resource | Contact / What They Help With |
|--|---|
| BenefitsCal (Official Portal) | benefitscal.com Apply online, upload documents, track your case, renew benefits, report changes. California's official CalFresh portal. |
| GetCalFresh.org (Simplified Application) | getcalfresh.org User-friendly alternative application portal — especially good for first-time applicants and mobile users. Connects directly to your county. |
| CalFresh Statewide Helpline | 1-877-847-3663 General CalFresh information, application help, referrals to county offices. |
| County Human Services Offices | cdss.ca.gov/county-offices All 58 California counties have a Human Services office handling CalFresh. Find your county and apply, submit documents, or request expedited processing. |
| California 211 | Dial 211 211ca.org Connect with local food banks, benefits navigators, housing, and emergency services across California. |
| CDSS CalFresh Program (State Policy) | cdss.ca.gov/calfresh Official state CalFresh policy, program updates, and resources for advocates and county workers. |
| CalFresh E&T Program | Contact your county Human Services office Enrollment in Employment & Training activities that satisfy ABAWD work requirements. |

| Resource | Contact / What They Help With |
|--|--|
| California EDD (Work Programs) | edd.ca.gov 1-800-300-5616 California Employment Development Department — approved work and training programs that satisfy ABAWD requirements. |
| Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles | lafla.org 1-888-245-4257 Free legal help with CalFresh denials, terminations, CFAP appeals, and hearings — LA County. |
| Bay Area Legal Aid | baylegal.org 415-982-1300 Free legal assistance with CalFresh and CFAP issues in the Bay Area. |
| National Immigration Law Center (NILC) | nilc.org Immigrant rights resources including CalFresh / CFAP eligibility guidance and public charge information. |
| Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) | ilrc.org 415-255-9499 Immigration and benefits guidance for nonprofits and individuals navigating CFAP and CalFresh. |

A Final Note: California’s System Is Among the Most Accessible in the Country — But 2026 Brings Real Risks

California’s CalFresh program has genuine structural advantages that most states do not offer: the 200% FPL income threshold, no asset test, no drug felony ban, CFAP for immigrants, expanded student eligibility, faster expedited processing, and public charge protection. These features make CalFresh more accessible than almost anywhere else. At the same time, the June 2026 ABAWD work requirement rollout and the April 2026 immigrant eligibility changes represent the largest simultaneous disruptions to CalFresh in recent California history. For advocates and nonprofit staff: the highest-value work right now is helping ABAWDs verify county waiver status and claim documented exemptions, and ensuring immigrant clients understand the automatic CFAP transition at recertification. Do not let clients assume their benefits are safe without verifying these two things.

This guide was compiled using information from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Legal Aid organizations, and publicly available CalFresh resources. It is informational only and does not constitute legal advice. Rules may change — always verify current rules at benefitscal.com, cdss.ca.gov/calfresh, or by contacting your county Human Services office.