

September 15, 2023

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

This All County Welfare Directors Letter provides guidance to County Welfare Departments on the early issuance of October 2023 CalFresh benefits due to the possible Federal government shutdown.



KIM JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

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September 15, 2023

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

FROM: ALEXIS FERNÁNDEZ GARCIA, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT & EMPOWERMENT DIVISION

SUBJECT: FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN AND CALFRESH: PLAN
FOR EARLY ISSUANCE OF OCTOBER BENEFITS

In response to the possible Federal government shutdown, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), in partnership with the Statewide Automated Welfare System (SAWS) Consortia, the Office of Technology and Solutions Integration, the State's Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) vendor FIS™, the County Welfare Directors Association of California, and County Welfare Departments, has established a contingency plan for the early issuance of October 2023 CalFresh food benefits. The early issuance applies only to CalFresh and does not impact California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) or subsidized childcare.

The new federal fiscal year (FFY) begins October 1, 2023 and Congress has yet to enact the 12 appropriations bills that set discretionary spending levels. Congress has until midnight on the final day of the FFY – September 30 – to enact legislation to fund programs covered by the appropriation process, or the federal government will shut down. If the Federal government is shutdown beginning October 1, 2023, there is a possibility that sufficient federal funding to issue October CalFresh benefits will not be available. Further, if the state does not act early enough in the month of September and the Federal government is shutdown, an early issuance of October benefits will not be logistically feasible.

Under this plan, CalFresh food benefits for October 2023 will be issued early, between September 28 and September 29, 2023, for most continuing recipients. **This plan will only be activated if Congress does not reach agreement to avoid a Federal government shutdown on or before September 20, 2023.** In the scenario that this plan is activated, CDSS will communicate directly with impacted partners with further instruction as soon as possible.

As part of the plan, CDSS submitted a waiver request to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) on September 14, 2023. The CDSS has requested a response by September 20, 2023. The State's ability to issue benefits early is contingent on this waiver approval.

This plan has been developed to ensure that CalFresh benefits are made available to the 4.8 million Californians currently participating and expected to be eligible for October 2023, with minimal impacts and risks to the program. Essential to the success of this plan is recipient communications. Effective recipient communications will ensure that continuing recipients are aware of the early issuance, can plan accordingly, and that county impacts are reduced.

Communications

Recipient communications must only be initiated if waiver approval is received from FNS, this plan is activated, and October 2023 benefits are issued early.

In the case of an early issuance, the county must implement mass change noticing. The county may use existing communication channels to inform recipients about early issuance, such as, but not limited to, county websites, posters in county offices, county telephone systems, press, and social media. Each county is also encouraged to work with local CalFresh Outreach partners and emergency food organizations in the community. There is no individual household noticing requirement. However, the county is encouraged to contact individual households, using communication channels such as, but not limited to, text messaging, email, and prerecorded phone messages. Additionally, CDSS will inform recipients and the public through the CDSS website, press, and social media. Sample recipient and county staff messages for county consideration are below.

Sample Recipient Messages

Because of the [possible] Federal government shutdown, CalFresh benefits for October 2023 will be issued early for most participants, between September 28-29, 2023.

If you receive your October CalFresh benefits early, you should plan your food budget knowing that these benefits will be the only benefits provided through the end of October.

If you receive CalFresh and have a report due in September, please complete the process as soon as possible. Completing your report on time will help us make sure you receive October benefits.

New applications, including expedited service, continue to be accepted and processed, as usual.

The EBT system continues to be operational.

Unless the Federal government shutdown is resolved, benefits for November 2023 MAY NOT be available. We are waiting for federal guidance and will keep you informed.**
*(**The county should only use this message if a Federal government shutdown occurs and is not resolved by early to mid-October.)*

Sample County Staff Messages

Because of the [possible] Federal government shutdown, October 2023 CalFresh benefits will be provided earlier than usual to most households – between September 28-29, 2023 instead of October 1-10, 2023. CalFresh recipients who (1) do not have a report due September 2023 or (2) have a report due September 2023 *and* whose report has been received *and* processed by September 19, 2023, will receive an early issuance.

Recipients who receive an early issuance of October benefits are reminded:

- That no additional CalFresh benefits will be issued in the month of October 2023.
- To plan their food budget knowing that there will be a longer period between the early issuance and their next issuance, which will be November at the earliest.

Recipients not included in the “early issuance” group will receive October benefits on their normal issuance date, as long as they are determined eligible and USDA reserve funds are available.

- Current recipients who have a September report processed after the early issuance, but before the end of the month, will receive benefits in October, as usual.
- Current recipients who have a September report processed after the last day of the month will have their discontinuance rescinded and receive benefits in October, as usual.
- New applicants determined eligible after the early issuance process will receive September benefits (with possible proration) and October benefits, as usual.
- New applicants who apply on or after October 1 and are determined eligible will receive October benefits in October as usual.

County Operations

Counties must continue all other CalFresh operations as usual. CalSAWS and CalWIN, in partnership with CDSS, will issue consortia-specific procedures related to early issuance. CalFresh administrative costs continue to be funded for October 2023.

Federal Government Shutdown Beyond October 2023

Unless the Federal government shutdown is resolved within the month of October, benefits for November 2023 may not be available.

Currently, there is no projection for how long USDA reserve funds will be available during the month of October. Absent a new USDA appropriation (i.e., a resolution to the shutdown), there may be insufficient federal funding available to issue November benefits. In this scenario, additional information and guidance will be provided by CDSS.

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the CalFresh Policy Bureau at CalFreshPolicy@dss.ca.gov.