



MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE

VICE-CHAIR

SUPERVISOR, FOURTH DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: June 25, 2026

12

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

AUTHORIZING PARTNER FOOD DISTRIBUTION PILOTS AT STRATEGIC COUNTY FACILITIES IN HIGH-NEED AREAS TO MITIGATE CALFRESH WORK REQUIREMENT DISPLACEMENTS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

Shifts in federal policy, specifically driven by House Resolution 1 (H.R. 1), imposed new strict work-reporting requirements for public assistance. These changes have created an immediate and severe crisis for vulnerable populations across San Diego County. Under these new requirements, an estimated 93,500 individuals may face a sudden reduction or complete elimination of their CalFresh benefits in the next year, and an anticipated 314,000 individuals will be subject to new Medi-Cal work requirements that put their health coverage at risk. This policy-driven displacement directly undermines the regional safety net and threatens to plunge high-need, low-access communities into profound food insecurity.

On November 4, 2025 (12), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to explore opportunities to establish a Safety Net Bridge program, which would provide medical services and access to fresh food to address anticipated gaps in services due to barriers created by shifts in federal policy. On March 24, 2026 (27), the Board authorized the CAO to develop a pilot implementation plan for the Safety Net Bridge program in high-need areas where Medi-Cal disenrollment is most likely and return to the Board within 180 days. In response to the new CalFresh eligibility changes going into effect on June 1, 2026, the Board also directed the CAO to report back within 45 days on implementation plans and cost estimates for food access component of the Safety Net Bridge Program. Staff returned with a report back memorandum on May 15, 2026, outlining actions the Board could take to implement the food access component of the Safety Net Bridge Program.

This proposed action directs the CAO to advance several of the options outlined in the staff report to provide an immediate and practical intervention strategy to address anticipated food insecurity by partnering with the region's two food banks, Feeding San Diego and the San Diego Food Bank, to hold food distribution events with their partner networks in the areas with the highest expected

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need in San Diego County. These food distribution events will allow the County to move swiftly to initiate immediate, on-the-ground action to provide food access, benefit enrollment assistance, and supplemental resources to communities most affected by the new CalFresh requirements.

County staff have identified 16 high-impact zip codes where families are being hit the hardest by the CalFresh eligibility changes. These identified neighborhoods represent nearly half of the impacted individuals countywide. While local food banks and community pantries work incredibly hard to provide access to food, there are still gaps in coverage that leave too many families vulnerable.

By utilizing existing County facilities like Library Branches, Community Centers, and Family Resource Centers as regional food distribution hubs, the County will establish a direct pipeline of same-day access to fresh food, benefits enrollment assistance and supplemental resources where it is most needed. These food events are to commence as quickly as possible, with event frequency, days, and times optimized to match the community partner's operational capacity.

These food distribution events should be continually guided by real-time County data tracking the loss of CalFresh benefits and local enrollment trends throughout the next year to remain flexible and nimble to the shifting needs of the hardest-hit communities. The data should be used as a living map rather than a static plan to pivot resources, scale operations up or down, and reallocate support as new high-impact areas emerge. This will enable the County to be responsive to residents' food access needs.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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1. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), or their designee, to implement emergency food distribution events and services to address food insecurity across identified high-impact zip codes for one year, in an amount not to exceed **\$1,000,000** to be allocated as follows:
 - a. \$500,000 to fund food distribution events across identified high-impact zip codes for one year, including agreements with San Diego Food Bank and Feeding San Diego, County of San Diego (County) associated facility costs, onsite staff support as needed, and dedicated staff to provide on-site benefit enrollment and supplemental resources at participating food distribution sites.
 - b. \$500,000 for food distribution to fill service gaps within the identified high-impact zip codes such as home delivery or distribution through trusted community providers, if necessary, and for costs associated with staff time to administer, manage, monitor, and review reporting on an ongoing basis.
 - c. Transfer appropriations of \$1,000,000 from Finance Other, Services & Supplies, to Health and Human Services Agency (HHS), Public Health Services.

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2. Find, in accordance with Government Code Section 26227, that funding emergency food distribution and related hunger relief services is necessary to meet the social needs of the population in the areas of health and welfare.
3. Authorize the CAO, or designee, upon successful negotiations, to execute grant agreements with the San Diego Food Bank and Feeding San Diego to fund emergency food distribution events and associated services and any alternative methods of food distribution to fill emerging service gaps that the County identifies as necessary to support hunger relief efforts and to amend the agreements as necessary, subject to availability of funding.
4. Direct the CAO to report back to the Board of Supervisors with a progress report on the emergency food distribution events specific to households impacted by H.R. 1 in 6 months and in 1 year. The progress reports should contain data on households served per event, community level service gaps identified and addressed, and allocations of both funding appropriations, and track the loss of CalFresh benefits and local enrollment trends.
5. Pursuant to Board Policy B-29, authorize the Deputy CAO, Health and Human Services Agency and the Chief Sustainability Officer to submit grant applications that support food distribution programs through June 30, 2027, for regional safety net services.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This proposed action in response to H.R. 1 intentionally targets resources toward 16 historically underserved and high-impact zip codes that bear a disproportionate burden of federal benefit displacements. By focusing on areas with a high concentration of low-income families, immigrant communities, residents of color, and other underserved communities, the proposed action works to dismantle structural barriers to nutrition access. By pairing face-to-face food distribution with on-site County eligibility staff, the Safety Net Bridge Program ensures that vulnerable residents receive immediate, dignified support while simultaneously reconnecting them to long-term stabilization resources.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This proposed action supports the County of San Diego’s (County) sustainability goal of economic stability and local resilience by reducing food waste and increasing food access. Through the Safety Net Bridge Program, the County will indirectly scale up edible food recovery in alignment with California’s SB 1383, which mandates that 20% of edible food otherwise destined for landfills be recovered to combat both hunger and greenhouse gas emissions. Through coordinated logistics at the identified County facilities, the County and its partners will ensure that recovered food remains safe, fresh, and accessible without imposing an unsustainable cost burden.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds associated with today’s recommendations are included in Finance Other in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-28 Adopted Operational Plan. If approved, this request will result in one-time costs of \$1,000,000 in FY 2026-27 for Health and Human Services Agency to implement emergency

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food distribution events and services to address food insecurity across the identified high-impact zip codes for one year. The proposed funding source is the Unlocked Reserves that was allocated for safety net services. This action reduces the safety net services balance of funds in Finance Other to \$43.7 million remaining to be allocated. There will be no additional staff years.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Shifts in federal policy, specifically driven by House Resolution 1 (H.R. 1), imposed new strict work-reporting requirements for public assistance. These changes have created an immediate and severe crisis for vulnerable populations across San Diego County. Under these new requirements, an estimated 93,500 individuals may face a sudden reduction or complete elimination of their CalFresh benefits in the next year, and an anticipated 314,000 individuals will be subject to new Medi-Cal work requirements that put their health coverage at risk. This policy-driven displacement directly undermines the regional safety net and threatens to plunge high-need, low-access communities into profound food insecurity.

On November 4, 2025 (12), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to explore opportunities to establish a Safety Net Bridge program, which would provide medical services and access to fresh food to address anticipated gaps in services due to barriers created by shifts in federal policy. On March 24, 2026 (27), the Board authorized the CAO to develop a pilot implementation plan for the Safety Net Bridge program in high-need areas where Medi-Cal disenrollment is most likely, and return to the Board within 180 days. In response to the new CalFresh eligibility changes going into effect on June 1, 2026, the Board also directed the CAO to report back within 45 days on implementation plans and cost estimates for food access component of the Safety Net Bridge Program. Staff returned with a report back memorandum on May 15, 2026, outlining actions the Board could take to implement the food access component of the Safety Net Bridge Program.

The County of San Diego (County) must take proactive steps now to help address gaps in food access as quickly as possible. County staff have identified 16 high-impact zip codes where families are being hit the hardest by the CalFresh eligibility changes. These identified neighborhoods represent nearly half of the impacted individuals countywide. While local food banks and community pantries work incredibly hard to provide access to food, there are still gaps in coverage that leave too many families vulnerable.

This proposed action directs the CAO to provide an immediate and practical intervention strategy to address anticipated food insecurity. If approved, the County would partner with the region's two food banks, Feeding San Diego and the San Diego Food Bank, to hold food distribution events with their partner networks in the areas with the highest expected need in San Diego County. By mobilizing existing County facilities like Library Branches, Community Centers, and Family Resource Centers as regional food distribution hubs, the County will establish a direct pipeline of

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same-day access to fresh food. These food events are to commence as quickly as possible, with event frequency, days, and times optimized to match the community partner’s operational capacity. As part of the Safety Net Bridge Program, which is intended to reconnect residents with vital benefits and provide ongoing support to maintain eligibility, County staff will provide on-site benefit enrollment and supplemental resources at the food distribution events. This will allow the County to provide food access, benefit enrollment assistance, and supplemental resources to communities most affected by the new CalFresh requirements.

These food distribution events should be continually guided by real-time County data tracking the loss of CalFresh benefits and local enrollment trends throughout the next year to remain flexible and nimble to the shifting needs of the hardest-hit communities. The data should be used as a living map rather than a static plan to pivot resources, scale operations up or down, and reallocate support as new high-impact areas emerge. In addition, this board action provides funding for alternative methods of food distribution to fill emerging service gaps to enable the County to be responsive to residents’ food access needs. For example, there may be a need to provide food through home delivery or by distribution through other trusted community providers, in order to reach residents in the identified high-impact zip codes.

This proposal bolsters the County’s food distribution efforts by working with trusted food banks that have determined the following six County facilities may be suitable as proposed host sites for food distribution events. Below is a list of proposed County facilities that could be utilized as event sites located near the 16 high-impact zip codes where families are being hit the hardest by the CalFresh eligibility changes, unless a more accessible and suitable site in that high impact area is identified in collaboration with community partners. The County would make these facilities available to providers through license agreements issued under the authority of the Department of General Services. The North Central Family Resource Center was not included in the report back memorandum on May 15, 2026, because County staff was concerned about the site’s layout. Since then, the San Diego Food Bank has addressed County staff’s concern, and the North Central Family Resource Center has been deemed suitable for food distribution operations. Further insights gathered from recently updated data on CalFresh benefit impacts determined there was a high-impact need in the surrounding area.

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO - SAFETY NET BRIDGE PROGRAM				
<i>Proposed Food Distribution Design & Maximum Cost Pilot</i>				
Designated Pilot Center / Location	High-Impact Zip Codes Served	Events per Year	Estimated Operational Cost Per Site	Est. Households Served Through All Events
El Cajon Family Resource Center	92020, 92105, 92021	12	\$65,628	1,200
South Region Live Well Center at Chula Vista	92114, 92154, 91911, 92173, 92115	12	\$65,628	1,200

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North Coastal Family Resource Center	92054	12	\$65,628	1,200
North Central Family Resource Center	92182, 92115, 92122, 92121, 92093, 92161, 92124	12	\$65,628	1,200
Spring Valley Library	91977	24	\$113,448	2,400
Spring Valley Community Center	91977	24	\$98,376	2,400

Through this proposed action, the County can build a stronger, more resilient safety net that addresses the growing nutritional needs created by H.R. 1. Moving the food access component of the Safety Net Bridge Program forward, along with on-site benefit enrollment and supplemental resources at the food distribution events, is a comprehensive approach that will address immediate hunger relief and strengthen long-term community health in areas that are most affected by the new CalFresh requirements. County staff will return to the Board in September 2026 with a proposed implementation plan for a pilot to address the medical component of the Safety Net Bridge Program.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today’s proposed action to implement the food access component of the Safety Net Bridge Program supports the Sustainability, Empower, and Equity Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego’s 2026-2031 Strategic Plan. Regarding Sustainability, this action reduces food waste and increases food access. Regarding Empowerment, this action bolsters our community partners’ capacity for increased food distribution. Regarding Equity, this action targets the areas with the highest expected need in San Diego County.

Respectfully submitted,

MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE
Supervisor, Fourth District

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A