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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Most Contra Costa County CalFresh Recipients to Receive February Benefits Sooner than Usual Due to Shutdown

USDA is Directing States to Issue February SNAP Benefits Early to Sidestep Impact of Federal Government Shutdown

Martinez, Calif. (January 15, 2019) – Most current recipients and eligible applicants of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known in California as **CalFresh**, will receive monthly benefits for February more than two weeks early. Due to the prolonged federal government shutdown, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which oversees SNAP, released guidance to states asking that they release February benefits early using available funding. In order to serve CalFresh recipients within a reduced timeframe, Contra Costa County’s **Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD)** has quickly moved to start issuing February benefits to eligible households on Tuesday, January 15.

The goal across the state is to deliver CalFresh benefits to 3.8 million Californians who are currently participating and known to be eligible for February. In Contra Costa, there are nearly 30,000 ongoing CalFresh cases. Most CalFresh recipients in Contra Costa County will see February benefits loaded onto their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards on January 15 and should understand that after that date they will receive no additional benefits for February 2019.

“We are urging our CalFresh customers to be judicious in spending their February benefits since they will receive them so early,” said Kathy Gallagher, EHSD Director. “They should ensure their funds last to serve their families’ food needs through the end of February. We do not know how long the federal government shutdown will last, however we will continue working with our local, state and federal partners to share information about developments and impacts to the services EHSD delivers in support of community members.”

Contra Costa County will issue the early benefit to these CalFresh households:

- All that do not have an SAR-7 (Eligibility Status Report) or an annual recertification due in January 2019.
- Those with a completed SAR-7 or recertification that the County fully processed by close of business on January 14, 2019.

Existing CalFresh recipients who are required to recertify their eligibility in the month of January and who complete their recertification after January 14, 2019, will have their benefits issued on or after February 1, 2019, if federal reserve funds are available. The same applies to individuals and families who *apply* for benefits on or after January 15, 2019.

The USDA issued instructions for states to implement the “early issuance” strategy because, due to the government shutdown, the agency had not received an appropriation to fund SNAP (CalFresh) beyond January 20. A blanket waiver overriding a requirement that ongoing households receive CalFresh benefits on or about the same date each month allows states to issue February benefits early. In California, benefits usually go out at the beginning of the month. EHSD will continue accepting and processing new CalFresh applications and expediting services for March as usual, and the EBT will continue to be operational.

It is unclear how long the current shutdown will last or how it may further impact CalFresh and other human services programs in Contra Costa County should it continue beyond February. Unless the federal shutdown is resolved, CalFresh benefits for March may not be available. EHSD is awaiting further guidance and closely monitoring the situation in Washington DC, as the department continues working with the Board of Supervisors, the County Administrator, and partner organizations to ensure that all community members remain healthy, safe and secure.

Contra Costa County CalFresh recipients can find details about the early issuance of CalFresh benefits and the impact of the federal government shutdown on the program at this link: <https://ehsd.org/important-notice-about-calfresh-benefits/>.

Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD)

Employment & Human Services partners with the community to deliver quality services to ensure access to resources that support, protect, and empower individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency. Based on the core values of delivering an exceptional customer experience, encouraging open communication, embracing change, practicing ethical behavior, and embracing diversity, EHSD envisions Contra Costa County will continue to be a thriving community where all individuals and families can be healthy, safe, secure and self-sufficient. More information about EHSD is available at www.ehsd.org.

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