

RECOMMENDATIONS ON NUTRITION CALIFORNIA WORKING FAMILIES POLICY SUMMIT

January 18, 2002

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) is a statewide food policy and advocacy organization working to improve the health and well being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. Current government statistics show that over 4.4 million Californians experience or are on the brink of the physical pains and consequences of hunger because they do not have adequate resources to put food on the table. Hunger is a political decision, and our State elected officials have the authority, resources and mandate to end hunger in California. Realizing this, CFPA recommends the following carefully targeted initiatives for the 2002 State Legislative Session.

I. Feeding Hungry Minds in Low-Performing Schools

Background:

All children should start the day with a healthy breakfast; a hungry child cannot learn. Yet, over 450 schools in California with large numbers of low-income children do not serve breakfast. As a first step toward breakfast for all of California's school children, CFPA proposes to focus on our lowest performing schools as identified by the School Accountability Act of 1999. Recognizing the essential role of good nutrition in educational success, these low-performing schools have a special responsibility to their students to serve breakfast.

Recommendation:

- A. The state legislature should enact legislation that requires low performing schools to serve school breakfast.

II. The Red Tape Reduction Act for Hungry, Working Californians

Background:

Over 71% of the households eligible for food stamps in California are working households. Yet, most of these working Californians are not getting the support that food stamps provide. Red tape in the Food Stamp Program makes it difficult for people to work and to get help putting food on the table. CFPA proposes The Red Tape Reduction Act for Hungry, Working Californians to reduce these hassles. The bill would contain 5 improvements, including the following:

Remove Redundant Red Tape: End Monthly Reporting

Food Stamp recipients are buried in paperwork. Each month food stamps recipients must submit a report on their earnings, assets and other factors in order to continue receiving benefits – even if none of these factors have changed. California is just one of eight states that still require monthly reporting.

Recommendation:

- A. The state legislature should enact legislation to end monthly reporting for food stamp recipients and for CalWORKs recipients (since 65% of food stamp recipients also receive CalWORKs) in California and require the state to choose another reporting option.

Supporting Welfare-to-Work: Transitional Benefits for Welfare Leavers

Only one in five people leaving welfare in California continues to receive food stamps. Yet, food stamps are an essential work support. They are critical to the welfare-to-work transition. The federal government allows states to provide welfare leavers with up to six months of transitional food stamps.

Recommendation:

- B. The state legislature should enact legislation to establish food stamps as a transitional benefit for welfare leavers.

Fast Lane to Food Assistance: Connecting Medi-Cal recipients to Food Stamps

Good nutrition is a cornerstone of good health, yet only half the low-income families enrolled in Medi-Cal get food stamps. One way for California to get a better return on its healthcare investment is to conduct targeted, low-cost food stamp outreach to MediCal recipients. In addition to repositioning the Food Stamp Program as a nutrition program linked to health care, this outreach would also eliminate some of the inconsistencies in income and asset limits between the two programs that currently prevent many MediCal recipients from getting food stamps.

Recommendation:

- C. The Act would require that all MediCal recipients receive a TANF (welfare) funded outreach flyer, which would enable California to eliminate the incompatible food stamp income and asset tests that prevent many MediCal recipients from getting food stamps.

County Options for Working Californians

While many working Californians are eligible for food stamps, many do not participate simply because their employment responsibilities make it difficult to apply. For example, it takes over 5 hours and 3 trips to the food stamp office to get help. How many working folks can afford to miss that much work? As food stamps are county-administered in California, counties have a responsibility to improve access to food stamps for working families.

Recommendation:

- D. The state legislature should enact legislation to require counties to choose from a list of local options to improve access. All counties in California would be required to report annually on which one of the following options it has chosen to implement:
- Open food stamp offices for at least five non-traditional hours each week (either evenings or weekends).
 - Increase outstationing of county workers available to accept food stamp applications by 5 sites.
 - Exempt food stamp applicants from the face-to-face interview by making existing exemption options standard practice.

III. Make Food Stamps Work for Working Californians:

Allow Hungry Folks to Own Reliable Cars

Background:

Food stamps increasingly serve as an essential nutrition support for low-wage working families, who must depend upon reliable cars to get to work. A key barrier to food stamp participation is our state's car rule that can disqualify folks if the value of their car exceeds \$4,650. These people face a difficult choice: Give up the car needed for work or go hungry. If we want food stamps to work for working Californians, they have to be able to get to work AND put food on the table.

Recommendation:

- A. Budget action to allow California to do what most other states are already doing: let working folks keep the car they need to keep their jobs and keep food stamps, too, so they can feed their families.