



# California Hunger Action Coalition

## *Legislative Priorities for 2011*

In California, over 5 million people are hungry or live in fear of going hungry. As more Californians have difficulty making ends meet, the number of people receiving CalFresh benefits (formerly known as California's Food Stamp program) has increased by 900,000 people since the recession began. Having hungry people in our community affects all of us, not just those struggling to make ends meet.

The California Hunger Action Coalition will address poverty and hunger among low-income Californians by addressing the following legislative priorities:

### **1. MODERNIZE AND SIMPLIFY THE CALFRESH PROGRAM:**

#### Background:

CalFresh brings over \$2 billion federal dollars into our state's economy every year, which is spent in local grocery stores. These dollars also produce a multiplier effect, with each \$1 in CalFresh generating \$1.79 in local economic activity. Unfortunately, according to the USDA, California has the worst participation rate in the nation, with approximately only half of those eligible not utilizing CalFresh. California's participation rate is low, in part, because our state has elected to impose costly barriers that make it difficult for people to apply for and receive benefits. The following recommendations will save state administrative costs and stimulate our local economies while increasing access to the CalFresh program.

- **Pass the CalFresh Act of 2011 (AB 6, Fuentes).** This bill will increase access to and participation in CalFresh by:
  - **Eliminating the Fingerprint Imaging Requirement.** California's finger imaging system costs an estimated \$17 million per year to operate, and does not increase program integrity, according to a 2003 State audit. Finger imaging discourages participation and hampers outreach. Removing the finger imaging requirement would save state general fund dollars and would allow counties to pursue phone interviews, on-line applications, and other strategies to remove administrative burdens and the long waits faced by applicants.
  - **Moving to Semi-Annual Reporting.** California is the only state to use a quarterly reporting system for CalFresh. Quarterly reporting is not only costly and burdensome to the state, but also contributes to the barriers in access faced by needy California families. AB 6 would move CalFresh and CalWORKs' reporting periods from quarterly to semi-annual, improving access to critical nutrition assistance and maintaining reporting alignment between the two programs.
  - **Implement a "Heat and Eat" (utility assistance) initiative.** A "Heat and Eat" initiative has the potential to increase federal CalFresh benefits by an average of 13% for households who meet certain qualifications, many who are elderly or disabled, and will simplify the verification process for all CalFresh households. Combined with recent efforts to modernize CalFresh, a Heat and Eat initiative will improve the application process, increase federal food assistance received by eligible families by an estimated \$8 Billion.
- **End the Lifetime Ban on CalFresh for Former Non-Violent Drug Offenders:** Everyone deserves a fair chance to improve their life. However, former non-violent drug offenders often find that they continue to be punished long after their sentence is complete. A combination of social and legal barriers prevents many from re-entering their community as contributing members. These barriers are exacerbated for those prohibited from ever receiving CalFresh benefits, which are critical for a successful transition to self-sufficiency. Without benefits that provide access to basic food, nutrition, and a safety net for families, poverty and further crime are encouraged. This bill will be introduced by Assemblymember Swanson.

## MODERNIZE AND SIMPLIFY THE CALFRESH PROGRAM CONTINUED:

- **Pass AB 69 (Beall) to increase access to CalFresh for seniors.** Currently, only 10% of eligible seniors and only 5% of eligible Social Security recipients in California participate in CalFresh. AB 69 (Beall) would allow the legislature to direct the State Department of Social Services to establish a two-location pilot in conjunction with the Social Security Administration to test streamlined strategies to enroll eligible Social Security recipients over the age of 65 into CalFresh.
- **Pass SB 43 (Liu) To Help Unemployed Keep CalFresh Benefits & Increase Employability**  
Currently, in 20 of our state's largest counties, some low-income Californians cannot receive federal food assistance provided through CalFresh unless they are meeting Employment & Training requirements. This is true even though our federal government has declared that, due to the economic crisis, unemployment should not keep someone from receiving these benefits. SB 43 brings more uniformity to the minimum work requirements for participation in the Food Stamp program and offers additional ways to meet those work requirements. SB 43 will help unemployed Californians get the food assistance they need during economic crisis and help them meet the work requirements of CalFresh, all at no cost to the state.

## 2. IMPROVE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAMS (SBP):

### Background:

For many children in California, school meals are an essential source of their daily nutrition and a safety net against hunger. Yet, over 2.2 million (66%) of low-income California children miss out on school breakfast. We need to find out why schools are not operating SBP and whether school districts have considered the array of strategies that can increase SBP participation. This information is necessary to shape future policies that will better support California's students through improved school breakfast programs.

## 3. STATE BUDGET - SUPPORT HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS:

### Background:

California's budget crisis continues with an estimated shortfall of \$25.4 billion by the end of the 2011-12 fiscal year. We urge the Governor and the legislature to promote economic development and employment growth through progressive revenue measures that will generate money to be used to support quality public services. Cuts to health and social service programs increase poverty and hunger and hamper economic growth in California.

### Unacceptable budget cuts that will increase hunger:

- Benefit reductions for low-income seniors and people with disabilities participating in the SSI/SSP program or the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants
- Benefit reductions for low-income families participating in the CalWORKs welfare-to-work program, especially ending the Safty-Net grants for children whose parents have been on aid for 48 months.
- Imposition of an increased share of cost for MediCal, IHSS, or Healthy Families recipients.

*The California Hunger Action Coalition (CHAC) is a broad-based membership organization of emergency food providers, consumers, and anti-hunger advocates. United in the belief that access to adequate, nutritious, and safe food is a fundamental human right, the coalition advocates for freedom from food insecurity and hunger for all Californians. For more information, contact the CHAC Legislative Committee Chairs Keisha Nzewi at [kNzewi@accfb.org](mailto:kNzewi@accfb.org) or Jessica Jones at [jjones@lafoodbank.org](mailto:jjones@lafoodbank.org).*