



# California Hunger Action Coalition

## *Legislative Priorities for 2008*

In California, over 5 million people are hungry or live in fear of going hungry. Having hungry people in our community affects all of us, not just those struggling to make ends meet. Hunger has an impact on our education system, our health care costs, the crime rate, and the overall health of our community. Helping families meet their nutritional needs is not only the best way to ensure that all Californians participate in the economy, the political system, and society, but is also a moral obligation of the state and its lawmakers. The California Hunger Action Coalition will address poverty and hunger among low-income Californians by addressing the following legislative priorities:

- 1. Increase Food Stamp participation and access to emergency food to improve the nutrition of low-income Californians.**
- 2. Promote health and fight poverty by ensuring that California's response to this year's budget crisis does not compromise the health and nutrition of low-income Californians.**
- 3 Help kids learn by protecting funding for school meal programs.**
- 4. Address federal-level hunger and nutrition priorities.**

### **1. FOOD STAMPS and EMERGENCY FOOD:**

#### Background:

The federally funded Food Stamp Program is the nation's first line of defense against hunger. Food Stamps help low-income families afford nutritious food. Food Stamps bring 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 generating \$1.84 in local economic activity. However, California has the third worst Food Stamp participation rate in the nation (50% of eligible people participating), with approximately 2 million eligible Californians not utilizing the program.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program in California is serving more people at a time when commodity foods from the federal government have dropped. It is important that the Legislature reauthorize the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) tax check-off, last year the check-off provided Food Banks with more than \$438,000 to serve the more than 8 million Californians living below 150% Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

#### State Policy Priorities:

- Make the most of federal food stamp resources by not cutting state funding for food stamp program administration.
- Oppose the proposal to cut the California Food Assistance Program, a critical component of California's Food Stamp program that helps insure that all legal immigrants receive food assistance.
- Support food stamp program streamlining measures like simplified six-month reporting, removal of duplicative asset tests, removal of the finger imaging system, and reduction of in-office interview burdens through the following two-year food stamp bills. These efficiency measures will save state administrative costs without decreasing access.

#### Food Stamp/Anti-Hunger legislation:

- Support- AB 433 (Beall): Connect health and nutrition programs by making recipients of MediCAL categorically eligible for Food Stamps and school meals.
- Support- AB 2844 (Laird): Eliminate red tape by moving Food Stamps to a 6 month reporting system.
- Support – AB 2726 (Leno) will permit other-than-state funds to be used to support the launch of the Healthy Purchase Pilot. The Healthy Purchase Pilot, signed by the governor in 2006, but not funded, would increase access to affordable, healthy foods in low-income pilot communities by providing incentives to neighborhood merchants to stock produce and allotting bonus value to Food Stamp recipients for purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables.

- Support- SB 1101 (Cedillo) would reauthorize the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) tax check-off. California tax payers can choose to donate from their state tax refund or add a contribution to their tax bill for EFAP. This money goes directly to California food banks to help purchase basic and healthy foods like rice, beans, canned tuna and peanut butter.

## **2. STATE BUDGET –HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS:**

### **Background:**

This year, the Governor’s proposed budget plan would address a \$16 billion shortfall largely through spending cuts. Health and human service programs take a substantial hit. Overall, this budget, if passed, would make it even harder for families in California to afford a healthy diet and, when coupled with actions in recent years, undoes much of the progress made on nutrition earlier by this administration.

### **State Budget Priorities:**

- Oppose the withholding of COLAs from CalWORKs, CAPI, and SSI/SSP recipients.
- Oppose cuts to CalWORKs, including full family sanctions, safety net modifications, and time limits for child-only cases.
- Oppose cuts to senior nutrition programs such as brown bag, home delivered meals, and congregate feeding programs.
- Oppose the reinstatement of quarterly reporting for Medi-Cal recipients.
- Support the Governor’s proposed CalWINS program, which would give a \$40 nutrition supplement to families transitioning off of CalWORKs. CHAC urges that this program be implemented with a minimum of bureaucratic red-tape for the State, counties, and working families.

## **3. SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS:**

### **Background:**

For many children in California, school meals are an essential source of their daily nutrition and a safety net against hunger. Yet, over 2.5 million low-income California children miss out on school breakfast, and nearly 75% of eligible children do not participate in the free / reduced price breakfast program. The Governor’s proposed budget includes a \$14.2 million reduction to child nutrition program reimbursement rates, and a reduction in nutrition start-up grant funding for school breakfast programs.

### **State budget and legislative priorities:**

- Oppose the proposed \$14.2 million cut to the reimbursement for free and reduced price meals.
- Oppose the proposed cut to child nutrition start-up funding for school breakfast programs, which would result in approximately 10 fewer schools would receive funding to start up or expand breakfast programs in the coming year.
- Support AB 1966 (Garcia): This bill would require each school that meets the qualifications for federal severe need reimbursement to offer a nutritionally adequate breakfast.
- Support AB 2300 (Laird): This bill would take advantage of families’ rigorous screening for Medi-CAL to enroll and verify the enrollment of Medi-CAL households in school meals.
- AB 2704 (Leno) will remove barriers to providing free water in schools. Water is recognized to be the drink of choice for obesity prevention, and it ought to be available to every child without charge.

## **4. FEDERAL PRIORITIES**

CHAC realizes the importance of federal-level advocacy on issues like the Farm Bill and child nutrition. Visit our website at [www.hungeraction.net](http://www.hungeraction.net) for more information about our federal legislative priorities.

*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 Chair, Colleen Rivecca, at [crivecca@stanthonysf.org](mailto:crivecca@stanthonysf.org) or 415-592-2729.*