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California Hunger Action Coalition (CHAC) State Legislative Priorities for 2007

1. **Increase Food Stamp participation to improve the nutrition of low-income Californians.**
2. **Support, fund and set measurable goals for state programs to end poverty.**
3. **Help children learn by improving the quality of school meal programs.**
4. **Fund programs and partnerships to increase healthy food access for low-income Californians.**

Governor Schwarzenegger has demonstrated a strong commitment to improving Californians' nutrition, health, and economic well being. In order to realize this vision of a healthy, prosperous California for all residents, the **California Hunger Action Coalition** asks the governor and the legislature to address poverty and hunger among low-income Californians by taking the following steps:

1. IMPROVE THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

Background: Food Stamps help low-income families afford nutritious food and 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 ranks dead last in Food Stamp Program participation, with 2 million eligible Californians not utilizing the program, resulting in a loss of as much as another \$2 billion in federal funds.

Increase Food Stamp participation to improve the nutrition of low-income Californians.

- **Support-** AB 433 (Beall): Connect health and nutrition programs by making recipients of MediCAL categorically eligible for Food Stamps and school meals.
- **Support-** AB 1382 (Leno): End the finger imaging requirement for "Food Stamp only" cases.
- **Support-** AB 1060 (Laird): Eliminate red tape by moving Food Stamps to a 6 month reporting system.
- **Support-** AB 508 (Swanson): Change Food Stamp eligibility requirements to eliminate a rule which prohibits certain individuals convicted of drug charges from receiving food stamps. This regulation is counterproductive to statewide efforts to rehabilitate ex-offenders into productive lives.

2. PROMOTE HEALTH AND FIGHT POVERTY

Background: CHAC supports Governor Schwarzenegger's desire to overhaul our healthcare system but his proposal to weaken the CalWORKs program by cutting grants to children and eliminating cost of living adjustments will weaken the safety net for low-income families. A comprehensive approach to improving the health and nutrition of all Californians must meet basic needs and recognize the dilemma that low-income people face in paying for health care and medication at the expense of a healthy diet. The erosion of programs designed to lift families out of poverty would undermine the very healthcare improvements proposed by the governor.

Support, fund, and set measurable goals for state programs to fight poverty. Support and fully fund welfare programs such as CalWORKs to ensure families have the resources to cover basic needs.

- Improve the state health care system
- Pass cost of living adjustments for low-income support programs.
- **Oppose** - SB 58 (Hollingsworth): This bill would impose “full family sanctions” on CalWORKs families who have reached their 60-month time limit or who do not fulfill work participation requirements. Currently, children are guaranteed assistance to meet basic needs like rent and food. If enacted, this bill would remove this guarantee and an estimated 40,000 families would lose assistance.

3. ENHANCE CHILD NUTRITION

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 has offered to increase the reimbursement for low-income children’s school meals, in conjunction with the implementation of improved nutrition standards. CHAC will support and advocate for legislation to increase participation in school breakfast and improve school meal quality.

Help kids learn by providing quality school meal programs.

- **Support** AB 92 (Garcia) This bill would require each school site that meets the qualifications for federal severe need reimbursement to offer breakfast beginning with the 2008-09 school year.
- **Support** legislation to increase school meal reimbursement tied to improved nutrition standards.

4. EXPAND ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD

Background: Food bank programs and funding the Healthy purchase Pilot Program (AB 2384, Leno – signed into law by the Governor last year) can provide access to free or discounted produce within low-income communities, enabling low-income Californians to make healthy food choices. Currently, California is one of the few large states that does not provide any state dollars to food banks. CHAC will support and advocate for legislation and budget measures that will increase access to healthy food in low-income communities.

Fund programs and partnerships to increase healthy food access for low-income Californians.

- Develop a public/private partnership between the state of California and its charitable food bank network to acquire, transport, and distribute healthy produce and other foods and to fund food banks’ efforts to end hunger. (Unlike many major states, California currently does not provide any annual funding for food banks, although food banks are on the front lines of responding to emergency needs for food).
- Provide state funds to augment federal Emergency Food Assistance Program to respond to disasters such as the recent freeze, as well as provide improved nutrition for 3 million food insecure Californians.
- Allocate funds for the Healthy Purchase Pilot, to 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 107 (Alquist) which seeks to develop a grant/loan program that would stimulate healthy food retailing in communities with traditionally poor access to healthy foods like produce.

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