

# Frequently Asked Questions: Fingerprint Imaging and Verification Reform

*AB 1057, the Food Stamp Modernization Act of 2009, seeks to remove barriers to participation in food stamps through the removal of fingerprint imaging requirement for non-CalWORKS and non-General Assistance recipients, verification reform, and by simplifying reporting requirements.*

*This document was developed to answer FAQ's about the Fingerprint Imaging and Verification Reform portions of the bill.*

## What is finger imaging?

California requires all adult household members to give their electronic fingerprint and photograph in order to get food stamp benefits or CalWORKs cash assistance. The objective of this statewide system is to prevent “multiple-aid fraud – a situation in which someone gets benefits in two counties at the same time or under two different names.

## Don't we need finger imaging to prevent fraud in the Food Stamp Program?

No. First, forty-six states fight duplicate aid fraud without an expensive finger imaging system by using other technology already at work in California (aka IEVS, or “[Income and Eligibility Verification System](#)”). If we believe that our fellow Californians are no more fraudulent than the residents of those 46 other states, then these tools should be more than adequate. Even if we don’t, California spends more on fraud protection than any other state--by far. For example, the federal government alone spent \$32 million on fraud control in California through the food stamp program, compared to \$5.4 million in Texas, which has a similar number of food stamp participants.

Second, the [California State Audit of the Statewide Fingerprint Imaging System](#) released in 2003 recommended that California should consider using less costly fraud prevention methods that better reflect the level of risk of multiple-aid fraud.

Third, the USDA released a [report](#) confirming that fingerprint imaging is not only a deterrent to food stamp participation, but that its effectiveness for preventing fraud is inconclusive.

Given the powerful existing tools and the proportionately large investment in anti-fraud activities, ending finger imaging should have little impact on fraud.

## **W**hat will we do in place of fingerprinting to prevent multiple- aid fraud?

In addition to IEVS (described below) and the other fraud protections in place, the state would add a field to both the food stamp application and the Medi- CAL Eligibility Data System (MEDS) database to capture driver's license or state ID numbers. Since the MEDS database is an eligibility system that interfaces with nearly all California health and social services programs, counties can use this new informational link to check for multiple aid fraud by searching for duplicate or suspiciously similar records in the MEDS database.

For a graphic on how this would work, click on this [link](#).

Duplicate – aid fraud will still be prevented through California's Income and Eligibility Verification System (IEVS), a set of computer matching systems that assist in the eligibility determination of all applicants and recipients the CalWORKs, Food Stamp, and Medi-Cal Programs. In 1984, Congress required state agencies to develop and implement IEVS. California has used IEVS since 1987 to verify information received from applicants and recipients. It matches information reported by CalWORKs, Food Stamps, Medi-Cal and General Assistance clients.

## **H**ow does this help with verification reform?

Adding a field to the food stamp application to capture driver's license or state ID numbers, county offices would make it easier for counties to exercise the option to use the numbers to verify things like an applicant's address, social security number, legal residence, date of birth, etc, with the DMV. This can help reduce the additional paper verification needed to be provided by the applicant and processed by the county. The DMV has already done the work to verify these elements; county workers need not needlessly repeat these efforts.

## **W**ill applicants be required to provide a driver's license number or ID number?

No. Federal law does not allow administrators to require this specific form of verification. This means that children or others without IDs will not be required to obtain one. All applicants, however, will still have to provide a social security number.

## **H**ow much will this cost?

There will certainly be some slight costs with adding the fields to the food stamp and MEDS databases. But these would be offset by the reduction in finger imaging costs, currently estimated at \$8 million a year. Also keep in mind that the verification reform process would be optional for counties; if they think it will take more time and energy in their county than current practice, they can choose not to use this option.

These costs would also be offset by the additional economic activity that would result from removing this barrier to participation. The USDA estimates that by eliminating fingerprint imaging, participation will increase by 4.3%, or by 107,000 people. The average monthly benefit would be \$329, which would bring \$178 million in federal food stamp benefits to California's economy resulting in \$328 million in economic activity.

## **H**ow will this legislation impact undocumented immigrants?

Undocumented immigrants in California are not eligible to receive food stamps.

This will not change under this legislation.

Citizen children of undocumented parents are already eligible for assistance, in some cases. These children, like all applicants must have a valid Social Security Number. This and other information will be run through IEVS, as is done in all other states to detect duplicate aid.

Undocumented adults do not have driver's licenses and therefore cannot be required to provide one.

## **H**ow would removal of the fingerprint requirement impact county food stamp offices?

Counties are responsible for ensuring that recipients of food stamps and CalWORKs provide their finger and photo image, which adds one more step to an already long and complicated application process. Finger imaging takes staff time that could be used instead to improve outreach, customer service, or payment accuracy.

In addition, many counties have attempted to address low food stamp participation by conducting outreach and out-stationing eligibility workers at non-traditional sites. But counties' obligation to complete finger imaging requirements make it difficult for them to reach out to eligible families. Because clients still need to come to the main food stamp office to complete finger-imaging requirements, counties have little incentive to outstation workers at non-traditional locations like schools and health clinics.