

2001 State Legislative Agenda

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. In 1998, over 1.3 million Californians experienced the physical pains and consequences of hunger because they did not have the resources to put food on the table. CFPA sees hunger as a political decision — decisionmakers have the capacity to end hunger in California. Realizing this, CFPA proposes three new carefully targeted legislative initiatives and renews three continuing challenges for the 2001 State Legislative Session.

New Initiatives:

- ▶ Make Food Stamps Work for Working Families
- ▶ Allow Hungry Folks to Own Reliable Cars

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 which disqualifies families if the value of their car exceeds \$4,650. These families face a difficult choice: Give up the car needed for work or go hungry. If we want food stamps to work for working families, they have to be able to get to work AND put food on the table.

Action: *CFPA is pushing for legislation which would 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.*

- ▶ Healthy Meals and Snacks in Child Care Settings:
Spreading the Word and Improving Quality

Children eat more meals in child care than they do at school during their entire K-12 education years. Because of the importance of the meals served in these pre-school settings, the Child Care Food Program (CCFP) exists to ensure that the meals are nutritious and affordable. Almost 300,000 children in California currently receive nutritious meals through the Child Care Food Program. But many more of the over 1,000,000 children in licensed child care should receive meals through this program. One of the reason for this lack of participation is that many of the state agencies in contact with low-income families and child care providers either do not know about CCFP or do nothing to promote the program. Another problem is that inadequate

reimbursement is jeopardizing the participation of the program's sponsors, forcing them to either close up shop — or cut corners on such important quality components as nutrition education.

Action: *CFPA is seeking legislative action to spread the word about the Child Care Food Program to the state agencies and others working on child care. CFPA is also pushing for action to address the inadequacy of the administrative reimbursement which threatens the program's ability to serve hungry children with quality nutrition and nutrition education.*

► Benefit or Barrier? Examine the Cost-Effectiveness of Finger Imaging Requirements for Food Assistance

As of August 1, 2000 all adult members of food stamp households in California are required to provide a finger image to get benefits. Finger imaging is purported to reduce multiple aid fraud, those cases where someone may get food stamps under different names. Investigative reporting by the New York Times found that there was little evidence that finger imaging deters fraud and that savings anticipated from finger imaging were exaggerated in New York State. The experience in New York prompts questions here in California: Are the benefits of finger imaging, namely fraud reduction, real? Anti-hunger advocates have already identified a number of adverse impacts from finger imaging, such as the intimidation of immigrants, the addition of complexity to an already lengthy and complex program and the limitation the equipment places on the mobility of county caseworkers. Do the benefits of finger imaging outweigh these negative impacts?

Action: *To answer these questions, CFPA is pushing for an audit to assess this whether finger imaging is effective and cost-effective.*

Continuing Legislative Challenges:

► Expand Child Nutrition Programs in the Community

California children increasingly depend upon community sites for supervision, tutoring and recreational activities after school and during vacations. These facilities — government agencies, like park and rec departments, and nonprofit groups, including churches, Ys and Boys and Girls Clubs — are struggling to serve nutritious meals and snacks. Heavy startup costs are a barrier, and while schools have access to a special startup fund, community sites, though just as needy, don't. Second, reimbursement for these meals and snacks was cut in the 1996 welfare reform bill, and this bill aims to restore these funds.

Action: *CFPA seeks legislation and budget action to allow community agencies the same access that schools have to start-up and expansion funds for needed out-of-school nutrition programs. CFPA seeks budget action to make up for cuts in the meal reimbursement rate for the Summer Food Program so that kids can receive nutritious meals when school is out.*

► Continue Food Assistance for Legal Immigrants

In October 2001, thousands of immigrants in the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) will be cut-off assistance. Though legal immigrants who arrived in the US before August 22, 1996 will still be able to receive assistance, those who arrived after this date will be denied assistance. In 1999, the Governor and the State Legislature took action to ensure that legal immigrants who came to the US before August 22, 1996 would permanently have access to food assistance. However, for each of the last three years, post-August 22nd immigrants have only been given one-year extensions on assistance. This has created two problems: First, without action in the 2001 legislative session, thousands of post-August 22nd immigrants will lose food assistance. Second, the confusion caused by the annual battles to continue benefits may be hurting participation. The arbitrary date of August 22nd is confusing, as is the permanent continuation of CFAP for some and annual continuation for others. Given this confusion it is not surprising that the CFAP is underutilized and hunger among this group persists.

Action: *CFPA will be seeking legislative and budget action to continue food assistance permanently to all legal immigrants regardless of their date of entry.*

► Making Food Stamps Work For Working Families:
Outreach to the Working Poor

Food Stamp rolls are plummeting in California, yet many Californians, especially working Californians, are still poor and hungry. Families aren't getting food assistance because of a number of barriers - chief among these is a pervasive lack of knowledge about food stamps. Many low-wage workers wrongly assume that food stamps are for people who aren't working. In the 2000 legislature, CFPA pushed for the state to draw down federal matching money for outreach on the Food Stamp Program to working families and others. Instead, the final budget included \$3 million from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant. Because of this funding source and the amount, communities have yet to see these funds, the federal match has been unavailable, and the money will not be used directly for food stamp outreach.

Action: *CFPA is asking the legislature to invest \$2 million in state funds (Non-TANF) that will draw down a federal dollar-for-dollar match to establish a competitive pool of money to be used for local outreach on food stamps. Counties and community-based organizations, the entities best able to do outreach, could apply.*

CFPA welcomes your feedback and your support of our legislative agenda. For more information, contact George Manalo-LeClair at (415) 777-4422 x103 or george@cfpa.net