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The Honorable Jim Beall
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 94249-0039

Re: Support for AB 1560 from the sponsor

Dear Chairman Beall,

California Food Policy Advocates is proud to sponsor AB 1560, and we write in strong support of this legislation. AB 1560 would raise the CalFresh gross income threshold for Medi-Cal recipients, making them income-eligible for nutrition assistance and certifying children in those households for free school meals. AB 1560 will align Medi-Cal and CalFresh (known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program- SNAP), and provide low-income households with a package of benefits to support their health.

Medi-Cal provides health coverage to a large caseload of low-income people, many of whom are likely eligible for but do not receive CalFresh. In the state with the lowest participation rate nationwide, making CalFresh available to low-income households should be a priority. Directly connecting Medi-Cal recipients with CalFresh could increase CalFresh participation and provide households with nutrition benefits that are a crucial component of health. Because of an existing practice known as direct certification, all children in CalFresh households are directly certified to receive free school meals; no additional paperwork is required. By enrolling Medi-Cal households in CalFresh, AB 1560 would improve access to nutritious meals at school.

CalFresh participation is low for a variety of reasons including stigma and a burdensome application process. To boost participation, 27 other states have both removed the asset test requirement and raised the gross income level for applicants of nutrition assistance. California successfully removed the asset test from CalFresh in 2008, which allowed households to establish modest savings and still receive benefits. AB 1560 would allow Medi-Cal recipients with gross income up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level to be income-eligible for CalFresh. In particular, this would benefit households with significant dependent care costs to still receive CalFresh.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, removing the asset test and gross-income test for CalFresh (SNAP) "has reduced administrative burdens and increased access to SNAP benefits households who would not otherwise be eligible due to asset or income limits."¹

AB 1560 would be an effective tool to increase CalFresh participation, minimize paperwork and provide administration relief.

In 2014, as California implements the Affordable Care Act by creating a health coverage exchange, nearly 2 million more Californians will enroll in Medi-Cal. AB 1560 will ensure that as more Californians enroll in Medi-Cal, they can also receive CalFresh benefits to support health.

We support AB 1560 because:

- **It would boost CalFresh participation among Medi-Cal recipients.** At a time when low-income Californians continue struggling to make ends meet, making CalFresh accessible to all who need it should be a priority. Given the large Medi-Cal caseload, directly connecting Medi-Cal recipients to CalFresh could greatly increase CalFresh participation.
- **Nutrition is a critical component of health.** CalFresh can support adequate nutrition at home, and would provide a critical benefit to Medi-Cal recipients. Children in those households could also be directly certified for free school meals.
- **It would reduce paperwork for parents and administrators.** AB 1560 could improve administrative efficiency by enrolling households in multiple benefit programs at one time. It would also minimize the paperwork that parents are traditionally required to complete in order to enroll their children for free school meals.
- **It would bring more federal dollars into the California economy.** According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), every dollar in CalFresh benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity. AB 1560 presents a great opportunity to bring more federal dollars into the local economy during these tough economic times.
- **It would bring California up to speed with 27 other states that have taken similar steps to increase access to nutrition assistance.** 27 other states have both removed the asset test *and* raised the gross income threshold for SNAP (CalFresh) recipients. With a 50 percent participation rate in CalFresh, California cannot afford to overlook policies that boost participation.

We urge this committee to pass AB 1560. Aligning CalFresh and Medi-Cal will provide valuable nutrition benefits to low-income Californians.

Sincerely,



Kerry Birnbach
Nutrition Policy Advocate
California Food Policy Advocates

ⁱ "SNAP Payment Errors and Trafficking Have Declined, but Challenges Remain," Statement of Kay E. Brown, Director Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues. July 28, 2010. <http://agriculture.house.gov/testimony/111/h072810/Brown.pdf>