**Letters of Support Needed for AB 6!**

 ***The CalFresh Act of 2011* is Heading to Senate Appropriations on Monday August 15th, 2011**

Assembly Member Felipe Fuentes (D-Los Angeles) has introduced AB 6, a bill that seeks to increase access to and participation in CalFresh by removing barriers and simplifying the application process, while simultaneously implementing cost-saving strategiess. AB 6 proposes several CalFresh improvements:

* **Less paper, more food: a move to semi-annual reporting**
* **Fight fraud and feed families: eliminate the Statewide Fingerprint Imaging System**
* **Fewer bills, more benefits: implement a “Heat & Eat” Initiative**

AB 6 has successfully passed through the California Assembly and Senate Committee on Human Services. In order for the bill to keep moving, we need you to voice your support for AB 6 to the Senate Committee on Appropriations, which will hear AB 6 on August 15th. . Whether AB 6 passes out of committee or is placed in the suspense file, it is essential that you send a clear message to the committee: AB 6 will benefit clients and the state as a whole.

We are asking that supporters address letters to the Chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Senator Christine Kehoe. Because the committee does not accept letters via fax you can submit the letters by hand to the committee office or send them to CFPA via email/fax and we’ll submit them on your behalf. **Letters should be submitted by Friday August 12th, 2011.**

**CFPA Contact**

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**Senate Committee on Appropriations**

State Capitol, Room 2206

Sacramento, CA

Questions? Contact Alexis Fernández at alexis@cfpa.net or 510-433-1122 x 111

[Date]

The Honorable Christine Kehoe

Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

State Capitol, Room 5050

Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Support for AB 6 The CalFresh Act of 2011**

Dear Senator Kehoe,

[Name or your organization] writes in strong support of AB 6 (Fuentes), *The CalFresh Act of 2011,* legislation aimed at increasing access to and participation in CalFresh by removing barriers and simplifying the application process, while simultaneously seeking cost savings. This bill would simplify the reporting system for both CalFresh and CalWORKs by implementing semi-annual reporting, eliminating the Statewide Finger Imaging System (SFIS), and establishing a “Heat and Eat” (or utility assistance) initiative.

[Please insert a sentence about what your organization does and why this issue is important to you.]

AB 6 would benefit clients, administrators, and the state as a whole by streamlining the application process and improving efficiency. These changes would provide significant administrative relief, improve client access, and generate significant statewide savings. In addition, removing barriers to access and increasing participation in CalFresh would stimulate the state economy. Increasing participation to nearly 100 percent of eligible households, as other states have done, would result in an additional $4.9 billion in federal benefits for needy Californians and more than $8.7 billion in associated economic activity.

Combined with recent efforts to modernize CalFresh, adopting semi-annual reporting is likely to help more eligible families maintain benefits and increase participation. In addition to eliminating unnecessary paperwork and simplifying the application process, semi-annual reporting has been shown to maintain program integrity in every other state across the country. With the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) actively pursuing California’s conversion to a simplified reporting system, such as semi-annual reporting, and requiring that significant progress be made toward this goal, now more than ever is the right time to establish semi-annual reporting for both CalFresh and CalWORKs. With potential savings in the tens of millions of dollars and clear benefits for clients as well as administrators, semi-annual reporting presents a win-win opportunity for California.

To further improve program administration, AB 6 would eliminate the Statewide Finger Imaging System (SFIS), which currently prevents *eligible* people from participating in CalFresh. The California State Auditor has twice shown that SFIS is neither effective nor efficient as a tool to fight fraud. USDA, the agency that administers CalFresh federally and funds 100 percent of CalFresh benefits, has strongly urged California to eliminate finger imaging and has placed a moratorium on implementing the policy in other states. Eliminating SFIS for all Californians maximizes statewide savings, as well as the benefits to clients. Complete elimination of SFIS reduces confusion at the ground-level and maintains program alignment.

Based on successful implementation in a number of other states, a “Heat and Eat” program presents an opportunity to maximize critical federal nutrition benefits. By providing all CalFresh households with a nominal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) benefit, many families would see a significant increase in federal CalFresh benefits and all households would benefit from a simplified verification process. This small upfront investment in “Heat and Eat” would generate an additional tens of millions of dollars in federal benefits for low-income California families and would consequently have a significant, positive impact on local and state economies.

Combined, the proposals of AB 6 represent considerable improvements to CalFresh that would make the application process more manageable for clients and administrators, increase benefits and improve access, increase program efficiency, and bring ongoing cost savings to the state.

We urge the committee to pass AB6. This is the time to ensure that low-income Californians are not going hungry because of unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles. California should not continue to lose out on the health and fiscal benefits of federal nutrition resources when far too many families are struggling to put food on the table.

Sincerely,

Your name

Your organization

CC: California Food Policy Advocates- Fax 510-433-1131