**Letters of Support Needed for AB 6 the CalF-R-E-S-H Act of 2011:**

**Finding Resources and Eliminating Significant Hurdles**

Assembly Member Felipe Fuentes 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 savings efforts. 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 was introduced in December of 2010 and will soon begin making its way through to the Assembly Committees. We are asking supporters to please fax letters of support to Assembly Member Felipe Fuentes, the author of AB6, at 916-319-2139. Below is a sample letter which we hope will help organizations, groups and individuals write their own letters of support, please “CC” CFPA or send us a copy via fax at 510-433-1131.

Questions? Contact Alexis Fernández at 510-433-1122 x111 or alexis@cfpa.net

Please address the letter to:

The Honorable Felipe Fuentes

State Capitol

P.O. Box 924849

Sacramento, CA 94249-0039

Re: Support for AB6

Dear Assembly Member Fuentes,

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (name or your organization) writes in strong support of AB 6, legislation aimed at increasing access to and participation in CalFresh by removing barriers and simplifying the application process, while simultaneously seeking costs savings. As you know, this bill seeks to simplify the reporting system for both CalFresh and CalWORKs by implementing a semi-annual reporting (SAR) system and maintaining program alignment. In addition, the bill proposes the elimination of the Statewide Finger Imaging System (SFIS) and the development of a “Heat and Eat” or utility assistance initiative.

About 50% of eligible Californians do not participate in CalFresh, ranking California second to last among states on measures of participation. Increasing participation to near 100% of eligible households, as other states have done, could mean an additional $4.9 billion in federal benefits for needy Californians. Moreover, increasing participation has the potential to benefit all Californians through more than $8.7 billion in associated economic activity. In times like these, we simply cannot afford to turn away valuable federal benefits and the related economic activity.

In addition to reasons mentioned above, we support AB 6 because (choose one, more, or all of the following reasons):

* Simplified reporting has been shown to increase participation, reduce paperwork burdens for recipients and administrators, and reduce payment errors rates in 49 other states. Combined with recent efforts to modernize CalFresh, changes in the reporting system are likely to help more families stay on the program and increase participation. California is currently the only state that has not adopted a simplified reporting system. In 49 other states simplified reporting has a positive effect on participation and paperwork reduction, as well as payment errors. In 2002, the federal government allowed states to implement SAR. Since then, various unsuccessful attempts have been made to realize this change in California.
* Now is the time for SAR; the federal government continues to press California to move to a simplified reporting system. In September of 2009, USDA rejected the California Department of Social Services’ (CDSS) request to extend the current quarterly reporting waiver. In February of 2010, working under a temporary extension of the current waiver, CDSS submitted a simplified reporting implementation plan that included a move to SAR. An essential component of the plan is the realization of the necessary statutory changes. This proposal seeks to promote progress in converting to SAR by providing the essential legislative vehicle and promoting significant progress toward implementation. Without said progress, USDA may reject California’s current reporting waiver and the state may need to move to simplified quarterly reporting; a step back, during a time when an opportunity exists to move forward.

* Finger imaging prevents *eligible* people from participating in CalFresh and has been shown to be neither an effective or efficient tool in fighting fraud.According to USDA, states that use finger print imaging have a 7% lower participation rate compared to the most similar states (in terms of caseload) that do not require a finger image. The federal government (which pays 100% of CalFresh benefits) has urged California to drop the practice and has established a moratorium on additional states taking it up. Moreover, finger imaging is not needed to effectively prevent and detect fraud. A state audit of the system showed that, particularly in terms of the tens of millions of dollars the state spends maintaining the system compared to the minuscule number of fraudulent cases detected, the expense could not be justified. Many other effective and economical fraud detection tools, such as the Income Eligibility Verification System (IEVES), are currently used in California. Given the scathing audit of the finger imaging system, the recent research on the negative impact on participation, and California’s need to reduce state costs by removing ineffective systems, finger imaging should end.
* As the negative effects of the recession continue to prove a hardship for many families, California should consider program improvements that increase access to and maximize critical federal nutrition benefits for needy families. A “Heat and Eat” or utility assistance initiative is one such strategy. If implemented, a Heat and Eat initiative would leverage additional federal nutrition benefits for a large number of CalFresh households and simplify the verification process for all households.
* Together, these proposals will provide needed relief to low-income Californians and ensure that fewer people are needlessly going hungry. California’s unemployment rate reached 12.4% in November of 2010, with 23 counties in California experiencing unemployment rates over 15%. My own county is experiencing an unemployment rate of XX% (insert number from [this report](http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/lfmonth/countyur-400c.pdf), if you wish). During these challenging times, California families are experiencing greater need than ever. Now is the time to make sure that people don’t go hungry because of unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles and that families and individuals are receiving all of the critical nutrition benefits for which they are eligible. Improving access to CalFresh will help ensure food security among low-income Californians.

As you are already aware, there is no better time than the present to make sure needy Californians don’t go hungry because of unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles. California can’t continue to lose out on valuable nutrition resources when far too many families are struggling to put food on the table.

We thank you for introducing AB 6 and look forward to supporting this critical legislation as it continues to move through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Organization

CC: Your own Assembly Member