

# Results from the 2002 State Legislative Session

*A report on requests from California Food Policy Advocates*

## Summary

This year, advocates faced a major uphill battle when asking for program improvements to fight hunger. California's huge budget deficit threatened existing program funding—and it made it nearly impossible to establish new strategies in the fight against hunger, even those with minor costs. Still, anti-hunger advocates emerged from the legislative session with one major victory and a number of steps toward better policies within California's food assistance safety net. Advocates took a giant step forward in 2002 by ending monthly reporting for food stamps and CalWORKs. To do so, we overcame historical opposition to easing the paperwork burden for California's families and counties. This change will result in more hungry Californians getting and maintaining food stamp benefits.

Advocates also made progress in our efforts to establish a legislative link between good nutrition and educational success. A strong school breakfast mandate bill passed the Assembly before encountering opposition in the Senate and on the Governor's desk. And throughout the legislative session, advocates educated legislators about the importance of providing food assistance for welfare leavers, on the challenges childless adults face in getting food stamps in areas of high unemployment, and other issues relating to hunger and nutrition. All of these efforts set the stage for success in next year's legislative session.

*For background and more information on all of the requests, visit [www.cfpa.net](http://www.cfpa.net)*

## Detail

### Remove Redundant Red Tape: End Monthly Reporting

What We Wanted:	For California to join over 40 other states in ending the burdensome practice of monthly reporting for food stamps, which buries recipients and counties in paperwork. As a result, it makes it difficult for low-income families to maintain their food stamp benefits <i>and</i> contributes to California's high error rate.
What We Got:	The Governor signed budget trailer bills AB 444 and AB 692 (a "clean-up bill"), establishing a quarterly reporting system for food stamps and CalWORKs in the state of California.

## Quick Results

<b>Request:</b>	<b>End Food Stamp Monthly Reporting</b>
<b>Result:</b>	It Will End April 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2003!
<b>Request:</b>	Require Breakfast at Low-Performing Schools
<b>Result:</b>	Vetoed by Governor
<b>Request:</b>	Transitional Benefits for Welfare Leavers
<b>Result:</b>	Not Included In Final Budget
<b>Request:</b>	Fast Lane to Food For MediCAL Recipients
<b>Result:</b>	AB 2415 Died In Assembly Appropriations
<b>Request:</b>	County Options for Hungry Workers
<b>Result:</b>	Not Included In Budget
<b>Request:</b>	Allow Hungry Folks to Own Reliable Cars
<b>Result:</b>	Not Included In Budget
<b>Request:</b>	Help in High Unemployment Areas
<b>Result:</b>	Not Included In Budget

Why:	<p>A number of factors played a part in victory:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Huge federal financial penalties for California's food stamp errors</li> <li>2. Persistent advocacy efforts (especially in keeping out undesirable amendments)</li> <li>3. Leadership and skillful negotiation from number of legislators and their staff</li> <li>4. Active advocacy from the County Welfare Directors and individual counties (San Bernardino, Los Angeles, etc.)</li> </ol>
Who to thank:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocates should thank a number of people for this important victory: Assembly Member Fred Keeley and Assembly Member John Longville, who introduced legislation that led to the end of monthly reporting.</li> <li>• Senator Wes Chesbro and his staff, who got the Senate efforts to end monthly reporting moving.</li> <li>• The staff of Speaker Herb Wesson and Senator John Burton, who skillfully negotiated the final reporting change language and kept out problematic changes</li> <li>• Casey McKeever with Western Center on Law and Poverty and Frank Mecca with the County Welfare Directors. Both have persisted in the long battle to end monthly reporting.</li> <li>• And members of the California Hunger Action Coalition whose calls, letters and legislative visits made a significant difference.</li> </ul>
Who to challenge:	<p>The state Department of Social Services, to implement the reporting change in a way that will make quarterly reporting a simple and straightforward process for clients. Stay tuned for more information about the development of quarterly reporting forms and procedures.</p>

## Supporting Welfare-to-Work: Transitional Benefits for Welfare Leavers

What We Wanted:	<p>For the state to utilize the option of providing food stamps as a transitional benefit for those leaving CalWORKs. Under the federal law, the state can provide food stamps for up to 5 months to people leaving cash assistance – <i>without reporting or other hassles</i>.</p>
What We Got:	<p>A policy victory but a budget loss. Legislators and their staff supported a policy of providing food assistance to folks leaving welfare, but because of the bad budget climate, legislators were unwilling to make the investment of resources.</p>
Why:	<p>Cost. Though both the Senate and Assembly budget sub-committees on human services entertained the issue, they did not provide the \$800,000 needed to cover administrative costs for implementing the transitional benefits.</p>
Who to thank:	<p>Assembly Budget Sub-committee chair Gil Cedillo and his staff for their support of this policy option.</p>
Who to challenge:	<p>Legislators, who need to recognize that while transitional benefits do have a small administrative cost, they result in significant benefits for low-income families in California. Estimates from the Farm Bill show that California would draw down \$800 million in federal benefits from transitional benefits over the next 10 years. Tight budget times require smart fiscal moves – like spending a little to gain bring millions of dollars in food benefits to the state.</p>

## Fast Lane to Food: Connecting Medi-Cal recipients to Food Stamps

What We Wanted:	To make it easier for Californians getting Medi-Cal to also get food stamps through a “Fast Lane to Food Stamps.” Specifically, we were seeking categorical food stamp eligibility for Medi-Cal recipients.
What We Got:	The Assembly Human Services committee passed AB 2415, a bill that established a link between food stamps and Medi-Cal, but the bill died in Appropriations. Even in defeat, AB 2415 helped make a strong case that hunger is a health issue and state-funded health care alone cannot solve the problems created by hunger.
Why:	AB 2415 lost momentum for two reasons; First, the categorical food stamp eligibility proposal was paired with an end to monthly reporting. The latter was moved to budget discussions, thereby drawing attention (and cost savings) away from AB 2415. Second, although a “Fast Lane to Food Stamps” would mean more people would be getting federal food stamp benefits, it would also result in some state administrative costs.
Who to thank:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assembly member Fred Keeley, author of AB 2415 and his staff for their persistent efforts to reach more hungry Californians with food stamps.</li> <li>• To the Central Coast Hunger Coalition for bringing this issue to Assembly member Keeley and for their advocacy efforts on AB 2415 and other legislation.</li> </ul>
Who to challenge:	Legislators and administrators. This attempt to link health care and food stamps was unsuccessful, but there will be other opportunities to ensure that low-income Californians achieve good health through a combination of health care and adequate nutrition. Advocates need to continue to send a strong message that good health won’t happen on an empty stomach.

## County Options for Working Californians

What We Wanted:	<p>Because it takes an average of 5 hours and 3 trips to the food stamp office to get help, CFPA requested that the legislature take steps to make it easier for working folks to get food stamps. Specifically, we sought legislation to require counties to choose from a list of local options to improve access. All counties in California would be required to report annually on which one of the following options it has chosen to implement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open food stamp offices for at least five non-traditional hours each week (either evenings or weekends).</li> <li>• Increase out-stationing of county workers available to accept food stamp applications by 5 sites.</li> <li>• Exempt food stamp applicants from the face-to-face interview by making existing exemption options standard practice.</li> </ul>
What We Got:	While the state budget did not require counties to make this policy change, our focus on this issue helped us select a legislative item for 2003: exempting applicants from the face-to-face interview.
Why:	Given our long list of human service requests and the overall madness of the state budget process, this item never didn’t get much attention from legislators or other advocates.

Who to challenge:	Counties are scrambling to respond to a 4.5% cut in administrative funding, which means that exempting face-to-face interviews is a viable option for next year's legislative session. Next year, advocates should challenge legislators to put this policy into place; it will should save money in administration and help remove a significant barrier for hungry working folks.
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## Protecting California's Workers in High Unemployment Areas

What We Wanted:	For California to request all available federal waivers to continue food stamps to childless adults (ABAWDS) in areas of high-unemployment.
What We Got:	The Assembly took an important step toward protecting vulnerable adults by passing a budget that required the State Department of Social Services (DSS) to request all available ABAWD waivers. Unfortunately, the Senate's version of the budget did not include this policy change. While this effort did not translate into legislative success, it did encourage DSS to take action on individual counties' waiver requests. As of May 2002, seven counties have received ABAWD waivers.
Why:	We believe there were two reasons: one, ABAWDS are not politically popular, and two, eligible counties are allowed to request waivers at their discretion. Unfortunately, not all counties have requested the waivers, largely because of local politics regarding assistance programs.
Who to thank:	Assembly Member Dion Aroner, who pushed for the inclusion of this item in the Assembly budget.
Who to challenge:	Advocates in waiver-eligible counties should challenge local administrators to request the waiver. We should also continue to challenge legislators to provide leadership on behalf of a politically unpopular but vulnerable group of people.

## Allow Hungry Folks to Own Reliable Cars

What We Wanted:	The removal of a key barrier to food stamp participation: a rule that can disqualify applicants if the value of their car exceeds \$4,650.
What We Got:	The Assembly Budget sub-committee took an important step by voting to exempt one car per household for food stamp and CalWORKs applicants. Unfortunately, this change was not included in the final budget.
Why:	Cost. Removing this barrier means more hungry folks would get CalWORKs and/or Food Stamps, both of which would require additional state resources. Last year, these costs were not a problem because the state had the option of shifting other resources to cover the costs. This year, those same resources were used instead to fund the reporting change described above.
Who to thank	Assembly member Gil Cedillo and the Assembly Budget subcommittee for their continued support of allowing food stamp recipients to own a reliable car.
Who to challenge:	The Governor and legislators during next year's legislative session. In 2000, Governor Davis unexpectedly vetoed legislation that would have made this important change. In the year ahead, advocates will need to make an extra effort to secure his support.

## Feeding Hungry Minds in Low Performing Schools

What We Wanted:	Given the strong research connection between breakfast and academic performance, we requested that the Legislature require low-performing schools to serve school breakfast. Specifically, we asked the Legislature to require school breakfast at schools that have Academic Performance Index (API) ratings at or below 700 and at least 20% free and reduced-price (FRP) eligible students.
What We Got:	The Assembly passed a tough mandate, but Governor Davis ultimately vetoed a weakened AB 2395 which would have required that schools that are not serving breakfast and meet the previous requirements of the bill (at least 20% of kids receive a free or reduced-priced meals, the school has an Academic Performance Index of 700) must discuss why they are not serving school breakfast at a local school board hearing.
Why:	<p>When the bill was passed out the Assembly, it still had the requirement that low-performing schools serve breakfast, not the watered down meeting requirement.</p> <p>In the Senate, the bill ran into several problems; chief among them was a problem with state mandate claim laws. Under the state mandate laws, if a school is required to do something and there is not adequate funding to meet the requirement, the schools could make claims to mandate commission for additional funding. Though federal reimbursement and state start-up funds existed to serve breakfast, legislators and staff were concerned that schools would make claims—both legitimate claims as well as claims designed to take advantage of the state law to obtain more funding (for example, by serving expensive meals or claiming new buses were needed to meet the requirement). In order to avoid this mandate claim issue, legislators stripped the requirement to serve breakfast from the bill and replaced it with the meeting requirement.</p>
Who to thank:	Assembly member Jackie Goldberg was the bill's author and consistent champion.
Who to challenge:	Legislators and the media, to examine the state's mandate claim laws and process. These laws make sense in principle; local entities should not have to bear the burden of unfunded mandates. However, in this instance and perhaps in others, the mandate laws have become a "boogeyman." Because some school districts have employed lobbyists to increase the amount of money received from mandate claims and because it is difficult to anticipate what might trigger a claim, policy makers are driven by fear that policies might create mandate problems in the future. These fears and concerns about abuse make it difficult to require schools to do what they should be doing, like school breakfast. The legislator needs to have the strength of a "requirement", but in this case, mandate claims robs them of this strength. Some argue that incentives must now replace requirements. But why give incentives to schools to do something they should already be doing, like serving breakfast? And during tight budget times, how can lawmakers create financial incentives? Without significant change to the state mandate laws or a reduction in legislators' fear, requirements like school breakfast mandates will likely continue to fail.

For more info on the 2002 State Legislative Session or for info on how you can help us in 2003, contact us at [george@cfpa.net](mailto:george@cfpa.net) or 415.777.4422.