



California Hunger Action Coalition

Legislative Priorities for 2009

In California, over 5 million people are hungry or live in fear of going hungry. Having hungry people in our community affects all of us, not just those struggling to make ends meet. Helping families meet their nutritional needs is not only the best way to ensure that all Californians participate in the economy, the political system, and society, but is also a moral obligation of the state and its lawmakers. The California Hunger Action Coalition will address poverty and hunger among low-income Californians by addressing the following legislative priorities:

1. MODERNIZE AND SIMPLIFY THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM:

Background:

Economists of all stripes believe that Food Stamp benefits are one of the most effective ways to stimulate the economy. Food Stamps bring over \$2 billion federal dollars into our state's economy every year, which is spent in local grocery stores. These dollars also produce a multiplier effect, with each \$1 generating \$1.84 in local economic activity. However, California has the third worst Food Stamp participation rate in the nation, with approximately 2 million eligible Californians not utilizing the program. California's participation rate is so low because our state has elected to impose costly barriers that make it very difficult for people to get on and stay on the Food Stamp program. The following recommendations will save state administrative costs and stimulate our local economies while increasing access to the Food Stamp program.

- **Replace Finger Imaging with DMV Identity Checks.** The costly finger imaging system does not increase program integrity, according to a 2003 State audit, yet it can discourage participation and hamper outreach. Replacing the requirement with DMV identity checks would allow counties to pursue phone interviews, on-line applications, and other strategies to remove administrative burdens and the long waits faced by applicants.
- **Reduce Paperwork Burdens.** Moving to simplified six month reporting will help California save money without reducing access to food stamps by reducing state administrative costs. Simplified reporting will help struggling families who find it difficult to deal with California's burdensome quarterly reporting system.
- **Remove the in-office interview requirement.** The federal government allows states to remove office interviews for food stamp applicants, yet California has not chosen to pass this flexibility on to counties. California counties should be able to manage their rising caseloads through phone interviews, on-line applications, and other strategies successfully employed by other states. These reforms make applying for food stamps easier and reduce administrative costs.
- **Opt out of the federal ban on Food Stamps for persons with drug felony convictions** so more persons in recovery can access federal Food Stamp benefits and decrease the likelihood of recidivism.
- **Eliminate unnecessary Food Stamp employment training requirements** so more single adults can access Food Stamps.

2. IMPROVE SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS:

Background:

For many children in California, school meals are an essential source of their daily nutrition and a safety net against hunger. Yet, over 2.5 million low-income California children miss out on

school breakfast, and nearly 75% of eligible children do not participate in the free / reduced price breakfast program.

State budget and legislative priorities:

- Oppose any reduction in state meal reimbursement rates for schools serving free and reduced price breakfast or lunch.
- Require California schools considered “severe need” by the federal government to offer breakfast. Schools that serve more than 40% of their lunches to low-income students are considered “severe need” – there are 500 such schools in California that do not offer free or reduced-price breakfast.

3. STATE BUDGET -- HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS:

Background:

This year, the Governor’s proposed budget plan would address a \$39.5 billion shortfall largely through spending cuts, and health and human service programs take a substantial hit. Overall, this budget, if passed, would make it even harder for families in California to afford a healthy diet and, when coupled with actions in recent years, undoes much of the progress made on nutrition earlier by this administration.

State Budget Priorities:

- Oppose the withholding of COLAs from CalWORKs, and SSI/SSP recipients and oppose any proposals to cut CalWORKs and SSI/SSP benefit levels.
- Oppose cuts to CalWORKs, including full family sanctions, safety net modifications, and time limits for child-only cases.
- Oppose the elimination of the CAPI program (the state funded SSI program for legal immigrants who are elderly or have disabilities.)
- Oppose the elimination of the \$30 million California Food Assistance Program (CFAP), a program that helps an estimated 23,000 legal immigrants in California receive food assistance.
- Oppose the proposal to make more low-income seniors and people with disabilities pay a share of cost for MediCal benefits. Too many California seniors and people with disabilities already have to choose between food and medical costs.

We urge the Governor and the legislature to promote economic development and employment growth through progressive revenue measures that will generate money to be used to support quality public services. We also urge our lawmakers to stimulate our local economies by passing through the federal CalWORKs COLA and the federal and state SSI/SSP COLAs. Economic relief for low-income Californians through programs such as CalWORKs and SSI is immediately spent on goods and services, and provides needed stimulus to local economies.

The California Hunger Action Coalition (CHAC) is a broad-based membership organization of emergency food providers, consumers, and anti-hunger advocates. United in the belief that access to adequate, nutritious, and safe food is a fundamental human right, the coalition advocates for freedom from food insecurity and hunger for all Californians. For more information, contact the CHAC Legislative Committee Chair, Colleen Rivecca, at crivecca@stanthonysf.org or 415-592-2729.