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Press Release --

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Contact:

Jessica Bartholow, cell 510-282-0909
Kim Wade, cell 415-531-3222

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**California Losing out on Millions of Dollars in Fight Against Hunger;
“Empty Forks & Lost Dollars” is Rallying Cry for Hundreds at State Capitol**

***New Report Finds that California is Nation’s Worst State
in Providing People with Food Assistance during the Economic Slump***

SACRAMENTO - At noon on Monday, May 12 on the West Capitol Steps, hundreds of Californians will ask the State to accept two “checks” totaling **\$81 million** -- money that would be available if the State reformed its Food Stamp Program to cut costs and pull down more federal dollars. Advocates from the California Hunger Action Coalition (CHAC) will present the oversized “checks” and hand deliver “million dollar bills” to the Governor throughout the day. CHAC will also release a new Report, “Last in Line,” revealing that California is the worst state in the nation when it comes to enrolling people in food stamps during the recent economic slowdown -- despite an above average unemployment rate -- costing the State, the food industry, and people in need close to **\$1 billion dollars**. Both events will occur at a Rally from 12 – 12:30 attended by legislators, families, seniors, emergency food providers, and advocates.

"As both California government and California families struggle to balance their budgets, we must take advantage of these win-win opportunities to save money, boost our economy, and upgrade our food assistance programs," said Assemblymember Darrell Steinberg, author of the “Save Money, Cut Hunger” Act, A.B. 231.

The Noon Rally will include, in addition to the “check” presentation and Report Release:

- Up-to-the-minute budget and legislative news from Assemblymember Darrell Steinberg (**confirmed**).
- The presentation of the prestigious Hunger Fighter Awards. This year’s awardees are: State Senator Richard Alarcon (**confirmed**); U.S. Congresswoman Diane Watson (Los Angeles); U.S. Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (Orange County); Mary McAnerna, the 100-year-old founder of Mary’s Kitchen in Orange County; Debra Garcia of Consumers Union; Moira LaMountain, from HOPE in Santa Monica; and Heidi Camorongon and the West Contra Costa County Unified School District Food Service Staff.
- Fun forks! – both 12 feet tall and fork-through-the-head hats – designed by the artist Roark Gourley (www.foark.com)
- Music from Alameda County singer and guitarist Francisco Herrera.
- A picnic lunch for the several hundred Californians coming from Los Angeles, Orange County, the Central Valley, the Central Coast, the Bay Area, Sacramento, and all across the State.

CHAC's new Report "Last in Line" reveals that California is the worst state in the nation when it comes to providing individuals and families with food assistance during a time of rising unemployment. All across the country, significantly more people have signed up for food stamps in the past two years as the economy has slowed -- but not in California. The reports findings include:

- Over the last two years, California's unemployment rate has risen to 6.9%, a higher rate and a larger increase than the national averages. But, at the same time, California's food stamp enrollment has remained virtually flat (dropping -.2 %), while national participation has risen 22.5% (nearly 4 million new people).
- In the last year, California's change in participation was the worst in the nation. While the national average increased 9.1%, California *fell* -4.4%. Only two other states had drops in enrollment: Hawaii (-3.9) and Rhode Island (-0.4); the other 47 had increases.
- California's neighboring states, by contrast, are some of the nation's best in responding to the current economic situation: the 3 states with the largest percentage increases in food stamp participation are Nevada, where 63% more people are getting help now than two years ago; Arizona, 62% more people; and Oregon, 46% more people.

The Food Stamp Program is the nation's number one defense against hunger, providing an average of \$83 in food benefits each month to people in need. But as a result of its flat participation trends, the State has lost an estimated **\$356 million in federal benefits** and a resulting **\$655 million in economic impact** on California grocers, farmers and the food industry. The full report can be found at: http://www.hungeraction.net/media/pdf_files/report_050803.pdf

CHAC Chairperson Jessica Bartholow, from the Alameda County Community Food Bank, commented on the dismal statistics in the Report: "We are asking our legislators and Governor Davis to address these problems by passing legislation that will not only help families in need, but that will also put \$11 million back into the state general fund and infuse the economy with hundreds of millions of federal dollars."

Two bills will be the focus of the Noon Rally and Hunger Action Day legislative visits:

- A.B. 231, introduced by Assemblymember Darrell Steinberg, would end fingerimaging (**saving the State \$11 million**); offer transitional food benefits worth **\$70 million in federal dollars** to people leaving welfare; encourage alternatives to face-to-face interviews of applicants in some circumstances; and adjust the limits on cars to allow for a reasonably valued vehicle.
- S.B. 43, introduced by Senator Gil Cedillo, would renew the existing "taxpayer check-off" on the state tax form that allows individuals to make voluntary contributions to California food banks, at **zero cost** to the State.

Both bills provide solutions to some of the problems identified in "Last in Line" and other barriers to reducing hunger.

The California Hunger Action Coalition (CHAC) is a broad-based membership organization of food program providers, consumers, and anti-hunger advocates from throughout the state. United in their belief that access to adequate, nutritious and safe food is a fundamental human right, the coalition advocates for freedom from hunger for all Californians.

www.hungeraction.net

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