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Ensuring Food Security for Transition Age Youth

Transition age youth, generally between the ages of 18-24, are among the County’s most vulnerable populations. Though resilient, they often struggle with self-sufficiency due to a lifetime of trauma and adverse childhood experiences. These youth, through no fault of their own, are often faced with housing instability, grim educational outcomes, and other circumstances that hinder their ability to survive. This adversity is compounded by hunger and insufficient food.

Some transition age youth experience food insecurity despite eligibility for CalFresh. Participating in extended foster care does not disqualify a non-minor dependent from eligibility for CalFresh benefits. Eligibility for CalFresh benefits is made on a case by case basis and considers the individual’s earned and unearned income, including any portion of the foster care payment they receive directly; assets; household composition; the amount of rent and utility expenses; student status and other factors. Nevertheless, according to Chapin Hall’s California Youth Transitions to Adulthood

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Study (or CalYOUTH), one in five participants said they ate less than they should and one in six youth reported that someone in their household skipped meals because of affordability. Almost one quarter of the participants reported not eating for a whole day almost every month. Overall, thirty-percent of the youth participants qualified as being food insecure using the United States Department of Agriculture measure. Most notably, according to the County Welfare Directors Association, at age 19, only 33% of current and former foster youth had ever accessed CalFresh.

In May 2017, the Board of Supervisors passed a motion to increase the CalFresh participation rate by 20%, with a goal of enrolling an additional 70,000 households into the program. The County's 2017-2021 Strategic Plan also supports the long-term success of transition age youth. In an effort to accomplish these goals and further reduce food insecurity among transition age youth, the County should double its efforts to improve access to CalFresh for former foster youth.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Direct DPSS, DCFS, and Probation to ensure its workers and community partners (such as campus support programs and Los Angeles Performance Pilot Partnership) are appropriately trained on the CalFresh application process and eligibility requirements for transition age youth;
2. Direct DCFS and Probation, in partnership with DPSS, to assist and screen transition age youth with applying for CalFresh upon every placement change (including youth in Supervised Independent Living Placements, transitional housing, and youth who experience housing instability);
3. Direct DCFS and Probation, in consultation with LAHSA, to require its workers to

ensure that all transition age youth are in receipt of or have an application for CalFresh pending during their 90-day transition plan meeting in furtherance of the County's Homeless Strategy A4 to preclude discharges to homelessness from foster care;

4. Direct DCFS, Probation and DPSS to track the number of transition age youth who are eligible for and/or receive CalFresh;
5. Direct CEO Legislative Affairs to support any proposals that eliminate barriers for transition age youth applying for CalFresh, including, but not limited to, any opportunities to truncate the CalFresh application for transition age youth; and
6. Direct DPSS, in collaboration with DCFS and Probation, to report quarterly on measurable progress made in improving access to CalFresh among transition age youth.