

**Opposing the Proposed Federal Rules to Cut Food Benefits**

Food insecurity is a significant concern in Los Angeles County (County). Reports estimate that two million County residents experience food insecurity on any given day. Symptoms of food insecurity extend beyond hunger and malnutrition. It leads to poorer health outcomes, increased hospitalization among children, and upticks in chronic disease among adults. In a report titled “Social Determinants of Health: Rising Food Insecurity in Los Angeles County,” the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health recognized that food insecurity is strongly associated with other social determinants of health including income, education, employment, and housing stability. Food security and health disparities are intrinsically linked. Ensuring access to nutritious food is key to achieving health equity.

The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is referred to as CalFresh in California, provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of families. The Brookings Institution has found that SNAP is the most important anti-hunger program. In the County, there are approximately 1,000,000 residents who receive CalFresh—California’s version of SNAP. The County Board of Supervisors and Department of Public Social Services continue to pursue new and innovative efforts to increase the number of residents who benefit from the program.

CalFresh is instrumental to decreasing poverty and unemployment. In fact, workers in low-paying jobs often rely on CalFresh to afford basic food for their families. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, CalFresh benefits help 1 in 11 California workers put

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MOTION

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food on the table. Many Californians have variable income, which would translate into empty plates without CalFresh for far too many.

Still, there have been attempts to reduce food benefits in recent years. Most recently, on July 24, 2019, the United States Department of Agriculture proposed a new set of rules for SNAP food benefits. These rules would, in part, end policies that allow California and other states to adjust eligibility to serve families with incomes modestly above 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level if their net income after basic expenses like shelter and child care is under 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. This “categorical eligibility” standard is crucial given that the federal government’s poverty guideline for a family of four is \$25,750.

By its own estimate, the United States Department of Agriculture anticipates that three million people nationwide would lose their food assistance as a result. The proposed rules punish low-income families and plunge them further into poverty. There is no question this harm will be most felt by children.

**I, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Department of Public Social Services to submit a comprehensive comment opposing the proposed rules to be submitted during the public comment period; and
2. Direct the Chief Executive Office (CEO), in consultation with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), to send a five-signature letter to the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture and the Los Angeles County Congressional Delegation to declare Los Angeles County’s opposition to the proposed rules and express the harm that it would cause to residents.

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HLS:enw