

CalFresh Student Eligibility

The COVID-19 health crisis has galvanized the nation to respond to the emerging needs of communities across the country. Through the passage of the Families First Coronavirus Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Acts (CARES), the Federal government has taken steps to reduce the financial impact on individuals and families; however, these efforts have not addressed the increasing need of college students facing food insecurity. Even before the pandemic, existing restrictions on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for college students prevented broad access to these individuals who already experience hunger at very high rates.

SNAP, a Federally funded program, provides anti-hunger benefits to eligible participants. In California, SNAP is referred to as CalFresh and is administered by the California Department of Social Services and Los Angeles County’s Department of Public Social Services. The current SNAP Student Rule limits eligibility for low-income college students unless they meet certain exceptions such as working 20 hours per week or participating in work study. The Rule creates unnecessary barriers for low-income individuals struggling with hunger, but its impact during the health crisis is even worse. With campuses closed and unprecedented job losses, students will have a difficult time meeting the strict eligibility rules.

MOTION

SOLIS _____

RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

KUEHL _____

HAHN _____

BARGER _____

In Los Angeles County, approximately, 1.1 million residents rely on CalFresh for basic nutrition assistance. While we do not have estimates on the number of students potentially eligible for CalFresh, a California State University (CSU) Study of Students Basic Needs released in January 2018 found that 41.6 percent of CSU students reported food insecurity. The report also noted the correlation between food insecurity among students with increased health and mental health issues and lower academic achievement.

In March 2019, Temple University's Hope Center for College, Community and Justice released its #RealCollege survey. This is one of the nation's largest annual assessment of basic needs security among college students. Nearly 47,000 students at 57 California Community Colleges participated in the study. The survey results indicated astonishing information about food insecurity:

- 50% of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days;
- 60% of respondents were housing insecure in the previous year; and
- 19% of respondents were homeless in the previous years.

According to the CSU Basic Needs survey, close to 70% of CSU students would be eligible for CalFresh based on their household income alone. However, when all the factors were considered, less than half of those in financial need would receive these critical basic needs funds. One reason CalFresh may be largely underutilized is because Federal and State eligibility criteria categorically disqualify most full-time college students from benefits.

I, THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office to send a five-signature letter to the members of the Senate and House Leadership, the Chairs and Ranking Members of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee, and the Los Angeles County Congressional Delegation in support of suspending the SNAP Student Rule.

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JH:mk