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April 26, 2012

The Honorable Diane Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Protect California's Nutrition Safety-Net in the Farm Bill

Dear Senator Feinstein:

California Food Policy Advocates is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by improving their access to nutritious, affordable food. We do this by pursuing policies that strengthen the federal nutrition safety-net, particularly the SNAP program, known in California as CalFresh. Currently, CalFresh provides roughly \$7.1 billion in federal nutrition benefits to 3.9 million low-income Californians.

Recent data from UCLA's Center for Health Policy Research indicates that 40% of low-income California adults across the state struggle with food insecurity. In some California counties this number is as high as 50%. In addition to providing households with income support, SNAP is the most effective response to food insecurity available to policymakers.

We urge you to work with the Senate Agriculture Committee to remove damaging provisions from the draft 2012 farm bill, as proposed in the initial chairman's mark-up by Senator Stabenow on April 20, 2012. In particular, Section 4002 would have drastic negative impacts on low-income Californians struggling to put adequate food on the table.

Section 4002 would restrict California's newly enacted "Heat and Eat" initiative, which gives states the ability to provide SNAP households with a nominal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) benefit. By providing households with this nominal LIHEAP benefit states are able to simplify paperwork for participants and administrators and increase benefit allotments for a significant number of households. Estimates indicate that when "Heat and Eat" is fully implemented in California as many as 200,000 households will see an average increase in benefits of about 13% or \$43 per month. As sponsors of the bill to establish "Heat and Eat" in

California, we believe these benefits will help alleviate the ongoing pressures on household budgets as the economy slowly recovers and the job market improves.

Now is the time to strengthen and protect the features of SNAP that make it one of the most effective programs in combating poverty and providing Americans with safety-net resources during tough times.

Despite an increasing caseload, only one in two eligible Californians participates in SNAP. Enrollment tools that streamline SNAP and make it more responsive to the needs of Californians are critical to combating hunger and ensuring that all Californians have adequate access to food.

There are numerous other provisions in the proposed farm bill under consideration in the Senate Agriculture Committee that are worth discussing. We are happy to provide our analysis of potential impacts of other proposed changes on low-income Californians, but we first and foremost want to draw your attention to the consequences of enacting the legislation with Section 4002.

We urge you to vote against the bill if Section 4002 is not removed. Eliminating “Heat and Eat” would harm low-income Californians and reverse the great progress we have made to simplify and improve SNAP.

If I can provide further information, don’t hesitate to reach me at 510.433.1122x103 or george@cfpa.net.

Sincerely,



George Manalo-LeClair
Executive Director
California Food Policy Advocates