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September 12, 2013

Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr.
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for AB 191 (Bocanegra)

Dear Governor Brown,

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) is in strong support of AB 191, legislation that would strengthen the connection between CalFresh and Medi-Cal. AB 191 would increase the likelihood that low-income Californians are provided a package of benefits that supports overall health and well-being by including both CalFresh and Medi-Cal.

California continues to struggle with low CalFresh participation. The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) latest estimate indicates that just over half of eligible Californians receive benefits. We've made considerable strides in addressing this problem over the last few years. Recent changes to CalFresh policies and procedures will likely have a positive impact on participation. Nevertheless, the gap in participation is large and to fully close this gap we must do more to ensure that all eligible Californians receive benefits.

With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act well underway California has the unique and timely opportunity to capitalize on the expanded scale, scope, and reach of Medi-Cal. As low-income Californians apply for Medi-Cal, many for the first time, we should establish policies, procedures, and systems that support simultaneous enrollment in other benefit programs for which they are eligible. The overlap in eligibility between CalFresh and Medi-Cal makes dual enrollment between these two programs not only feasible, but particularly promising as an opportunity to increase CalFresh participation.

Full integration between CalFresh and Medi-Cal, often referred to as horizontal integration, is part of the long-term vision for improving CalFresh participation shared by advocates and key stakeholders. While AB 191 does not fully integrate CalFresh into the Medi-Cal application process, it does simplify a discrepancy in eligibility rules that prevents dual enrollment for some households. This change brings us one step closer to effective integration.

Many individuals receiving Medi-Cal are unaware that their household may be eligible for CalFresh. In addition, some households with a Medi-Cal recipient may be net income eligible for CalFresh, but have a gross income above the current limit. As a result, the CalFresh gross income test is preventing otherwise eligible households with high needs and high expenses, such as child care costs, from accessing CalFresh benefits.

CFPA is a statewide policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well being of low income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food.

AB 191 would make low-income households with a Medi-Cal recipient (with income up to 200% FPL) categorically eligible for CalFresh, therefore removing this CalFresh income barrier. The gross income test would be raised from the current limit of 130% FPL to 200% FPL for categorically eligible households with a Medi-Cal recipient. The net income test would still apply.

In addition to the positive impact on clients, CFPA would like to highlight the economic opportunities that AB 191 presents for all California. In particular, the opportunity to make a sound fiscal investment in California's safety net.

As both the Assembly and Senate Appropriations Committee's analyses indicate, a relatively small state investment will result in hundreds of millions of dollars in federal nutrition benefits provided directly to low-income California families. This investment will help ensure that all Californians have enough nutritious food to ward off hunger and food insecurity. This investment will also result in significant economic activity benefiting all Californians.

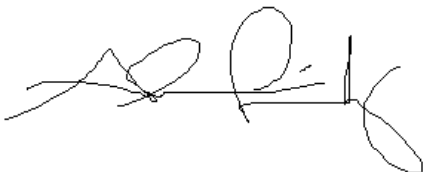
USDA has shown that Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, known as CalFresh in California) benefits exert a multiplier effect that stimulates the economy. Every dollar in SNAP expenditures generates \$1.79 in related economic activity. This economic stimulus can also be measured in terms of impact on sales tax revenue. Receipt of CalFresh benefits allow households to redistribute income that would normally be used to purchase food. A portion of this redistributed income can be spent on taxable goods, which generates sales tax revenue for the state and local governments.

AB 191's other fiscal benefits include the opportunity to improve administrative efficiency, both for CalFresh and school meal enrollment. AB 191 promotes administrative efficiency by strengthening the connection between CalFresh and Medi-Cal and encouraging dual enrollment at a single point of application. AB 191 also supports direct certification. Direct certification automatically certifies children in CalFresh households to receive free school meals without additional paperwork.

As California's most important anti-hunger program, CalFresh helps just over 4 million low-income Californians afford a nutritionally adequate diet. Yet, there are nearly as many Californians eligible for CalFresh that do not participate. Low CalFresh participation means less for all Californians – less nutrition assistance, less economic activity, and less sales tax revenue for the state and local governments. These losses can be mitigated by eliminating unnecessary barriers to CalFresh participation.

AB 191 provides a guaranteed return on investment that we simply cannot afford to pass up. CFPA strongly supports AB 191 and asks that you do the same.

Sincerely,



Alexis Fernández
Nutrition Policy Advocate
California Food Policy Advocates