

AB 231: THE SAVE MONEY, CUT HUNGER ACT

The federal Food Stamp Program is a cost-effective tool for helping hard-working families put food on the table. As a federally funded benefits program, it provides over \$1.5 billion in food purchasing dollars to stimulate local economies throughout California. Yet USDA has found that *only half of eligible Californians* are participating in the Food Stamp Program. Assembly Member Steinberg's legislation saves money and eliminates many barriers that keep low-income Californians from getting federally funded assistance. It would:

- ***Eliminate the Statewide Fingerprint Imaging System.*** California is just one of a handful of states that requires all adult members of food stamp households to provide a finger and photo image in order to get benefits. This requirement is aimed at preventing people from getting food stamps in more than one county or under different names—but it costs \$10 million each year and adds a major hassle to the already lengthy and intimidating food stamp application process. A recent audit by the Bureau of State Audits shows that given the miniscule amount of multiple-aid fraud, the state cannot justify the tens of millions of dollars it spends on the implementation and annual operation of this system.
- ***Extend five months of transitional food stamp benefits to families leaving CalWORKs.*** Families moving from welfare to work receive 12 months of transitional Medi-Cal benefits to ensure access to health care during their transition. Yet most families leaving welfare have no support at all when it comes to putting adequate, healthy food on the table. Last spring, Congress gave states the opportunity to draw down millions of federal dollars by providing five months of transitional food stamp benefits for people leaving welfare—without any administrative burden for the county or the client. These benefits will help California's families make a successful—and permanent—transition from welfare to work.
- ***Direct counties to expand their use of face-to-face interview alternatives for applicants who have jobs, limited transportation, or other difficulty in getting to the food stamp office.*** The face-to-face interview, which is a standard requirement for food stamp applications, almost always takes place during regular business hours—a time when many clients must be at work. Policymakers have already removed this barrier from other programs for low-income working families. Medi-Cal, for example, no longer requires face-to-face interviews. Providing clear procedures for counties to enroll applicants by phone, mail or other means will help working families keep their jobs *and* put food on the table.
- ***Allow hungry Californians to get food stamps and own a reliable car by changing the state's auto resource rule for food stamps and CalWORKs.*** California is one of only 11 states that continues to use the most restrictive limit of \$4,650 for the value of a food stamp applicant's car. Especially in rural parts of the state—where UCLA researchers found as many as 40 percent of lower-income adults struggling to put food on the table—a car is a critical resource for getting and keeping a job. California's outdated rule gives working families an impossible choice: give up the car you need for work, or become ineligible for food stamps.

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