

# Removing Finger Imaging: AB 6 (Fuentes)

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**Note:** AB 6 was amended before coming out of the Senate Committee on Appropriations and heading to the Senate Floor. The following fact sheet has been updated to reflect these amendments (Updated: 8.30.11).

## ►► ISSUE

CalFresh provides critical nutrition benefits to help needy families eat better. These federal benefits don't just help struggling families; they help our struggling economy as well. But California is leaving federal benefits on the table because it has chosen to put up barriers to CalFresh participation that just don't exist in most other states.

California is just one of two states (Texas recently ended the practice) that require finger print imaging as part of the application process. Under California's requirement, all adult CalFresh household members must come into the office to get finger printed. This makes the application process in California a family affair – in other states only one adult has to come into the office, if at all. This means that California can't fully benefit from the on-line applications, call centers, and other strategies that have been used to improve access.

## ►► NEED

Finger imaging prevents *eligible* people from participating in CalFresh. According to USDA, states that use finger print imaging have an average 7% lower participation compared to the most similar states (in terms of caseload) that do not require a finger image. Because of these concerns over finger imaging, the federal government (which pays 100% of the CalFresh benefits) has urged California to drop the practice and has established a moratorium on any additional states taking it up.

Finger imaging is not needed to fight fraud – lots of other tools are already in place. In fact, finger imaging is only designed to catch one type of fraud: duplicate aid. Other states rely on more effective and economical strategies for fighting duplicate aid and many other types of fraud. Given the scathing audits of finger imaging systems, the recent research on the negative participation impacts, and California's need to reduce state costs by removing ineffective programs, finger imaging for CalFresh should end.

## ►► REQUEST

Save the state the millions of dollar it wastes on the redundant, obsolete finger imaging system by pulling the plug and removing the requirement for all CalFresh households.

## ►► HISTORY

Finger imaging began in California as a result of a now controversial analysis of a Los Angeles County pilot. Without major questions about the need for the system or cost-effectiveness being answered, the state passed legislation in 1996 and completed implementation of the system by 2000.

The California state auditor reviewed the system in 2003 and could not justify the expense. Subsequently, legislative actions to cut the state's losses and end the system (in whole or in part) have occurred in every legislative session since. None have been successful and the system has grown in cost over recent years.

In 2009-10, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) actively requested that California and two other states end the practice. Since there is no federal requirement to finger print, states have been asked to justify the practice.

## ►► OUTCOMES

Removing the finger imaging requirement for CalFresh household will mean that the state can be smarter in its fraud fighting efforts, can receive more federal nutrition benefits, and can save the millions spent on this obsolete and redundant system.