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**Obama Administration Admonishes California for Requiring
Finger Printing for Food Stamps**
State Assembly Budget Committee Votes to End the Practice

Oakland, California – May 24, 2010 – Today the California Senate Budget Committee voted to end the practice of fingerprinting food stamp applicants (officially known as finger imaging), which costs the state millions of unnecessary taxpayer dollars. The vote comes on the heels of a letter the Obama Administration's top USDA official responsible for domestic anti-hunger programs recently sent urging an end to the practice in California and three other states (AZ, NY, TX), calling the practice a "barrier to participation" that is "not cost effective."

"I'm pleased that the Senate Budget Committee took the first critical step in eliminating this costly and outdated requirement," said Sue Sigler, Executive Director of California Association of Food Banks. "Given the current budget deficit that we face, eliminating finger imaging is a simple act that the state can take to bring more federal dollars to California. With this one act, we can simultaneously help families struggling with hunger and bring in more federal dollars to stimulate the state's economy."

Due to a number of barriers to food stamp participation that the state has erected – including finger imaging – California is next to last in the country for food stamp participation and leaves billions in food stamp dollars in Washington. A recent USDA report estimates participation is seven percentage points lower in states which use technologies like finger imaging.

Writing to the State of California, which has allowed finger imaging to continue even though 46 other states do not use it, USDA Under Secretary Kevin Concannon stated: "More cost-effective alternatives to finger imaging should be actively considered both as a cost savings and as a means of program simplification." Saying that finger imaging was a "prominent and continuing area of concern," Concannon's letter also read: "Most States satisfy the requirement to establish a system to prevent duplicate participation by matching names with social security numbers, which is far less costly than finger imaging yet is equally effective at detecting duplicate participation."

Commented Sigler, "While Under Secretary Concannon has previously expressed concerns about finger imaging, this letter is his most direct request to date for California to end this counter-productive requirement. Given that Mr. Concannon was previously the statewide social services administrator in three different states (IA, ME, and OR) – all of which declined to use finger imaging but had high rates of participation and low rates of program fraud – he is extraordinarily qualified to make the reasoned judgment that the practice wastes taxpayer money, restricts access for eligible families and increases hunger. Since advocates, social policy researchers, leading federal, state, and local officials have all previously concluded that finger imaging is detrimental, now that the Obama Administration has said the same thing, it is about time that we end this harmful practice."

About CAFB:

The mission of California Association of Food Banks is to provide a unified voice among food banks to maximize their ability to build a well nourished California. For more information on the California Association of Food Banks please visit our website at www.cafoodbanks.org.

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