



April 3, 2007

The Honorable Jim Beall
Chair, Assembly Human Services Committee
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 94249-0024
Via Facsimile (916) 319-2124 and (916) 319-2189

Re: Support for AB 433
Support for AB 1060
Support for AB 1382

Dear Assembly Member Beall,

The California Association of Food Banks (CAFB), representing 40 food banks united to build a well-nourished California, is pleased to support three bills that will help people in need of food receive assistance through the Food Stamp Program.

Currently, California's Food Stamp Program is ranked *last* in the country for participation, with only 46% of eligible people enrolled. This poor participation rate means that California does not receive \$2 *billion* in federal funds available for food assistance, increasing pressures on charities, counties, and the State to meet unmet needs. While food stamps provide significant assistance to the 2 million current participants in California – 2/3 of whom are children – it's clear we can do better.

To that end, CAFB leads California's Food Stamp Outreach initiative, through the Departments of Health Services (DHS) and Social Services (DSS) and the USDA. We partner with 46 food banks and community groups in 22 counties to reach 135,000 people with food stamp information and application assistance. We have recently helped pilot a state hotline and developed a new website, www.myfoodstamps.org. However, the most innovative outreach strategies can not overcome policy barriers that only State (and federal) legislation can reform.

The State has the opportunity this year to eliminate some of the major barriers that block as many as 2 million eligible people from receiving nearly \$100 per month in food stamp benefits. The State would benefit from increased participation: food stamp benefits are 100% federally funded and every \$5 delivers \$9.00 of economic impact, including increased state sales tax revenue (according to the USDA and the LAO).

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Therefore, CAFB supports three bills that will improve food stamp participation by people in need of food assistance:

- A.B. 433, Asm. Jim Beall -- Connect with MediCal: Working families will especially benefit from a direct connection between MediCal and Food Stamps, as duplicative paperwork is reduced and good health is reinforced. A new name will also highlight the importance of nutrition.
- A.B. 1060, Asm. John Laird -- Simplify Reporting: California should join the 46 states that have cut red tape for families and for counties by moving from quarterly-reporting to semi-annual reporting, while preserving program accuracy and integrity.
- A.B. 1382, Asm. Mark Leno -- End Finger-imaging for Food Stamps: This costly system is not an effective way to bolster program integrity, according to a 2003 State audit, yet it discourages participation, adds unnecessary steps to the enrollment process, and hampers outreach.

We encourage you and your fellow members of the Assembly Human Services Committee to vote yes on AB 433, AB 1060, and AB 1382, as important and prudent steps in our efforts to ensure good nutrition for all Californians.

Sincerely,

Kim McCoy Wade
Executive Director