

Assembly Bill 2297

CalWorks and CalFresh : Hunger Impact

Assemblymember Dr. Joaquin Arambula
As Amended March 12, 2018

THE PROBLEM

Over 40 Million Americans, 4 million of whom live in California struggle to prevent hunger every day. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as CalFresh in California, is our most important defense against hunger. While many rely on this benefit, it amounts to less than \$2.00 per meal. According to The National Medical Association this amount is less than what is needed to purchase a healthy diet. Because benefits are so low, nearly one-third of households that receive SNAP must also rely on food banks to meet their basic need for food

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) increased monthly benefits for participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which not only boosted their purchasing power so that they may avert hunger, but also helped stimulate the economy. It did this, in part, by increasing the benefit beyond the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) standard used to determine the minimal monthly cost of food for an eligible household, and consequently maximum monthly benefit levels. This increase averaged of 13.6 percent. This increase in benefit was documented to have reduce incidents of hunger and increase the purchase of healthy food.

On November 1, 2013, Congress ended the increased and reduced the benefit to the base standard. Since the ARRA boost to SNAP benefits was terminated, the average family of three has had their benefits reduced by \$28 per month.

The poorest families with children often face the most severe food shortages, especially when they lack access to clean water or members of the family have medical conditions that result in higher food costs. Increasing the monthly benefit in the program will help prevent hunger, support

healthy food purchases, stimulate the economy and create jobs

CURRENT LAW

CalFresh Program Benefits are set by Federal Law and Guidance based on a methodology established by the United States Department of Agriculture. Under federal law and guidance, states are allowed to add additional benefits to the amount of food benefits eligible people can receive and, in fact, two states already have.

Current state law allows for a special needs allowance for recipients of the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program when the recipient has a diet related disease that requires a special diet.

THIS BILL

AB 2297 will significantly decrease hunger in California by:

- Increasing the benefit by \$28, the amount it would have been if Congress did not end the boost to the benefits established in 2010.
- Making changes to the CalWORKs special food benefit so that it is delivered on EBT as a food benefit (rather than a cash benefit, which makes it countable income in CalFresh).
- Adding lack of fresh water and high blood levels as reasons to receive the CalWORKs special food needs supplement.
- Codifying the current guidance on the amount of the special needs supplement.

SUPPORT

California Association of Food Banks (Sponsor)
California Coalition of Welfare Rights (Sponsor)
Western Center on Law and Poverty (Sponsor)

Alameda County Community Food Bank
California Catholic Conference
California Immigrant Policy Center
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
Children's Defense Fund – California
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
County of Santa Clara
Feeding San Diego
Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
Orange County Food Access Coalition
Women Organizing Resources, Knowledge and
Services, WORKS

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