

# Assembly Bill 3073

## Reducing Hunger & Recidivism

Assemblymember Buffy Wicks (AD-15)

### THIS BILL

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This bill will require the California Department of Social Services to issue guidance to County Human Services Agency on how to maximize CalFresh eligibility for people leaving jail or prison.

### THE ISSUE

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The Reentry Policy Council of State Governments, which is a bipartisan working group with representatives of national associations of probation, parole, and corrections administrators, courts, police, and mental health and housing experts, issued a report that credits public benefits and job training as key contributors to successful reentry of people exiting prison.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, a report by Harvard University's Bruce Western states that the costs to connecting people leaving prison to public benefits like CalFresh, "are offset by increased employment and reduced crime and correctional costs for program participants...Achieving these objectives will yield a sustainable public safety that overcomes the long-term negative consequences of criminal punishment and promotes the economic improvement of poor communities."<sup>2</sup>

Thousands of Californians are released from prison or jail every year. Unfortunately, with few or no job prospects, approximately two-thirds of those released from prison will be rearrested – and almost one-half will be re-incarcerated—within three years of their release. Even worse, a person exiting prison or jail is likely to

experience hunger due to high post-incarceration unemployment and poverty rates. Eighty percent of incarcerated individuals are low-income and thus are eligible for programs, such as CalFresh.<sup>3</sup>

Across the country, state and county administrators of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as CalFresh in California, are enacting pre-enrollment and early applications projects with the administrators of their prisons and jails to ensure that individuals have immediate access to benefits following release. By doing so, these states have also been able to benefit from the immediate eligibility of people being released to participate in job training programs funded with 50% federal match through the SNAP Employment and Training Program. Providing pre-enrollment access to these types of benefits for individuals being released will not only improve outcomes of a very vulnerable population but also improve public safety by increasing their chances of employment and financial stability and reducing their risks of reoffending.

### SOLUTION

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AB 3073 will provide County Human Services Agencies guidance on allowable and promising practices to ensure CalFresh eligible people are receiving federally funded anti-hunger benefits and employment training immediately following their release from jail or prison.

Studies have shown that people are less likely to recidivate if they are connected to basic needs safety net programs. Providing a pre-

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community.* Council of State Governments. Reentry Policy Council. New York: Council of State Governments. January 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Western, Bruce. 2008. "From Prison to Work: A Proposal for a National Prisoner Reentry Program." (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2008) 3-5. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/12\\_prison\\_to\\_work\\_western.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/12_prison_to_work_western.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Eisen, L.B. (2014). Paying for Your Time: How Charging Inmates Fees Behind Bars May Violate the Excessive Fines Clause. New York, NY: Brennan Center for Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/paying-your-time-how-charging-inmates-fees-behind-bars-may-violate-excessive-fines-clause>

enrollment program can help reduce risks of reoffending, reduce food insecurity, and help support formerly incarcerated individuals as they re-enter into their communities.

## **SUPPORT**

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- Bread for the World – *Co-Sponsor*
- California Association of Food Banks – *Co-Sponsor*
- Western Center on Law and Poverty – *Co-Sponsor*

## **CONTACT**

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