

Assembly Bill 1965

California Anti-Hunger Response and Employment Training Act of 2022

Assemblymember Buffy Wicks (AD-15)

THIS BILL

AB 1965 will establish the California Anti-Hunger Response and Employment Training (CARET) program to fight hunger and support work among individuals who have been determined ineligible for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

THE ISSUE

Over 4.6 million Californians currently receive SNAP (CalFresh) nutrition assistance. CalFresh is the state's most effective anti-hunger program, supporting the health of our low-income communities while also creating jobs and benefitting our state's food economy. In 1996, federal welfare reform implemented strict time limits for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) receiving SNAP benefits. ABAWDs are CalFresh recipients ages 18 to 49 without dependent children, who are considered fit to work. Someone with ABAWD status is time limited to just three months of CalFresh within a 36-month period unless they:

1. Live in a state or county with an ABAWD waiver;
2. Work an average of 20 hours each week or participate in a qualifying employment and training program or workfare activity;
3. Are granted an individual exemption.

The 2018 Farm Bill included a provision to reduce the number of discretionary exemptions available for people who will lose benefits as a result of the ABAWD time limit, from 15 percent to 12 percent of the state's number of

individuals subject to the ABAWD time limit. Subsequently, the Trump Administration proposed regulations to further reduce protections to low-income, out-of-work, and underemployed people subject to the time limit. Thankfully, the Trump Administration's proposed rule was vigorously opposed in the courts and ultimately withdrawn by the Biden Administration.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports that individuals likely to be cut off by the three-month limit have an average monthly income of approximately 17 percent of the federal poverty level and typically qualify for no other income support.

Currently, California has a statewide ABAWD waiver in place based on California's eligibility for extended unemployment benefits. The statewide waiver is expected to expire on June 30, 2022, which would lead to many individuals losing eligibility of crucial CalFresh benefits.

SOLUTION

AB 1965 will establish the CARET program to provide benefits for individuals who lose eligibility for federally-funded CalFresh due to the ABAWD time limit. It will also allow this population to continue accessing CalFresh Employment and Training programs to support work. Additionally, this bill will direct the Department of Social Services to issue guidance to maximize use of the individual waivers available in federal law.

Hunger never makes any person better able to prepare for work, secure a job, or succeed at their place of employment. This bill will provide support to individuals who would lose

eligibility of CalFresh and helps ensure that these individuals have access to food during challenging times.

SUPPORT

California Association of Food Banks
(Sponsor)

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