



Senators Wiener and Dodd and Assemblymember Wicks Announce Legislative Package to Reduce Food Insecurity among Californians Experiencing Hunger

SB 173, SB 285, and AB 1022 increase the number of Californians who can to receive food assistance through CalFresh

By **Office of Sen. Scott Wiener**
February 25, 2019, 11:27:51 AM

Sacramento February 25, 2019 – Today, Senators Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) and Bill Dodd (D-Napa), and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks (D-Oakland) announced a legislative package to reduce food insecurity among Californians, by increasing the number of families and individuals who can access CalFresh (formerly called food stamps), the state’s most effective anti-hunger program. Over 4.1 million low-income households in California are currently food insecure, and California is among the lowest-performing states to connect households to federal food assistance. This legislative package seeks to increase participation in the program by low income Californians and to ensure more people have access to quality, nutritious food.

Senate Bill 173 (Dodd) increases awareness and utilization of CalFresh by college students participating in work-study programs, by creating a more uniform eligibility determination process. Senate Bill 285 (Wiener) streamlines CalFresh enrollment by setting clear and accountable statewide enrollment goals, improving ease of access to enrollment for eligible Californians, and eliminating questions deemed unnecessary and that only create obstacles in the enrollment process. AB 1022 (Wicks) fights hunger and supports work among individuals who have been determined ineligible for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) because of inflexible and ineffective three-month time limits.

“No one in our state should go hungry for lack of support,” said **Senator Wiener**. “It is a moral failure to allow so many Californians to live day-by-day not knowing when they will have their next meal. As a state, we can do more to ensure everyone eligible for federally funded nutrition assistance is getting that assistance. These three pieces of legislation will significantly reduce the number of Californians experiencing food insecurity.”

“Students shouldn’t be forced to make the heartbreaking choice between getting an education and eating,” said **Senator Dodd**. “Hunger is a serious problem on college campuses across the state and my bill takes an important step toward putting food on the table. I am also proud to be working with my colleagues to ensure that nobody, whether students, seniors, children, or unemployed Californians live in fear of hunger.”

“Access to healthy food is critical to prevent health problems and keep people job-ready,” said **Assemblymember Wicks**. “Making people go hungry is not a humane or effective way to help people find jobs. Taking steps to make sure everyone is fed keeps California strong and it is simply the morally right thing to do.”

SB 173 (Dodd):

Throughout California, college students whether on UC, State, or Community College campuses experience food insecurity every day. Many are unaware that they meet one of the numerous exemptions needed to qualify for CalFresh as a student. One particularly underutilized exemption is participating in state or federal work-study. Students who participate in work-study programs have a strong likelihood of qualifying for CalFresh, yet many are unaware and never apply. SB 173 requires the Department of Social Services in consultation with representatives of the office of the Chancellor of the Community Colleges, the office of the Chancellor of the CA State University, and the UC Chancellors’ offices to create a standardized form to be used by the colleges to verify the work-study exemption and qualification for CalFresh benefits. Colleges must also distribute the form, to the extent practicable, to all students approved for state or federal work-study.

SB 285 (Wiener):

Currently, California has nearly 2 million residents eligible for CalFresh who are not receiving benefits, holding the fourth worst rank among all states. California also last in connecting seniors to CalFresh programs, failing to reach 80% of eligible seniors. As a result, 3.7 million low-income adults and 2 million children in California are threatened by inadequate nutrition and food shortage. SB 285 seeks to enroll these families and individuals in CalFresh, which will result in up to \$3.3 billion in federal food benefits for California. These benefits will help farmers, grocers, the local economy, and the individuals and children at risk of inadequate nutrition. Furthermore, the reversal of the social security income cash-out policy (which previously banned SSI recipients from receiving CalFresh benefits) has created the unique opportunity to enroll nearly 500,000 SSI clients. SB 285 will help enroll more eligible individuals by:

- Implementing a plan to enroll at least 75% of newly-eligible SSI recipients within the first 18 months of Cashout and reach 95% enrollment within 5 years
- Ensuring Medi-Cal recipients eligible for CalFresh are offered a simplified enrollment process
- Increasing access to easier enrollment for non-English speaking households, seniors, and people with disabilities
- Conducting an analysis of racial impacts to identify disparities among counties, and create a universal application for all social service programs

AB 1022

In 1996, federal welfare reform implemented strict limits for Able-Bodies Adults Without Dependents (ADAWDs) receiving SNAP benefits. ABAWDs are CalFresh recipients ages 18-49 without dependents who are considered fit to work. They are limited to just three months of CalFresh within a 36-month period unless they work an average of 20-hours a week or participate in a qualifying employment and training program or workforce activity, live in a state or county with an ABAWD waiver (California does not have one), or are granted an individual exemption. While some counties in California have had an ABAWD waiver at some point, most counties have already lost their waivers or will be losing them by mid-2019. Individuals likely to be cut off by the three-month limit have an average monthly income of

approximately 17% of the federal poverty level. AB 1022 will establish the California Anti-Hunger Response and Employment Training (CARET) program to create an equivalent state-funded nutrition benefit for individuals who lose eligibility for federally funded CalFresh due to the ABAWD time limit. It will also direct the Department of Social Services to issue guidance to maximize use of the individual waivers available in federal law.

“Food banks play a pivotal role in California’s fight against hunger, but we know that our pantries alone cannot assure food security for people struggling to make ends meet. We strongly believe that we cannot achieve our mission of ending hunger in San Francisco and Marin without an equitable and accessible CalFresh program. It is unacceptable that three in ten eligible households don’t gain access to our nation’s largest anti-poverty and nutrition program. We rank 4th worst in the nation for enrolling our eligible residents, leaving billions of dollars of benefits and local economic activity on the table. SB 285 sets an ambitious vision for a CalFresh program that holds government accountable and provides dignified access for all eligible Californians.” **Paul Ash, Executive Director at San Francisco-Marin Food Bank**

“An arbitrary time limit on food assistance makes it harder – not easier – to find work. This bill will protect Californians from inhumane and ineffective federal policy that increases hunger and poverty.” **Stephen Knight, Director of Policy and Partnerships, Alameda County Community Food Bank**

“Time limits are out of touch with the reality of today’s low wage job market, which is characterized by unstable and inconsistent schedules. A third of workers that rely on our programs report working less than 20 hours per week.” **Larry Sly, Executive Director, Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano**

“We are excited to build on the historic opportunity with end of the SSI ‘cash-out’ policy to expand CalFresh access. We know that many of the program improvements identified as most helpful to enroll seniors and people with disabilities will help all eligible Californians access nutrition assistance and lead healthier lives.” **Andrew Cheyne, Director of Government Affairs for the California Association of Food Banks**

“SB 285 takes action to make government work for those struggling to make ends meet. California ranks at the bottom of the nation at connecting seniors and the working poor with CalFresh, which provides federal financial assistance for groceries. Burdensome application processes, misinformation, and stigma lead to a loss of billions of federal dollars each year for people to buy food and contribute to local economies. Almost everyone eligible for CalFresh has worked, paid taxes, and have fallen on hard times. California must make it easier for people to provide for themselves and their families, and age with dignity and health. SB 285 is social justice legislation to make government accountable to those too often left behind.” **Tracey Patterson, MPH, Director of Engagement and Strategy for California Food Policy Advocates**

For full text of each bill please click on the respective bill number: [SB 173](#), [SB 285](#), [AB 1022](#). The bills were introduced on January 28, February 13, and 1022 respectively, and will be set for committee hearings in the coming months.