

TALKING POINTS ON ENDING FINGER IMAGING IN CALIFORNIA

The following talking points can help you educate your elected officials and community leaders about the importance of ending the costly and ineffective Statewide Fingerprint Imaging System.

- The state-wide finger imaging system wastes taxpayer dollars. A recent audit by the Bureau of State Audits states that given the insignificant amount of multiple-aid fraud, the state cannot justify the tens of millions of dollars it spends on the implementation and annual operation of this system.
- In a two-year period, the finger imaging system found only 45 cases of duplicate-aid fraud—out of a caseload of almost 2 million people. California is spending \$10 million each year to eliminate a fraud rate of 0.2 percent. In a year with a budget deficit of \$35 billion, this is a poor use of government funds.
- The welfare system has changed dramatically in the years since finger imaging was first legislated. Strict work requirements under welfare reform have created a substantial barrier to multiple-aid fraud, as it would be nearly impossible for a family to meet a 30-hour-a-week work requirement in more than one county at the same time.
- California is just one of a handful of states that requires all adult members of food stamp households to provide a finger and photo image in order to get benefits. A number of states—including Michigan, Illinois, Maryland and New Jersey—have piloted or considered finger imaging but dropped the program because it wasn't cost effective.
- USDA allows states to use finger imaging, but it doesn't encourage it. The federal agency strongly endorses more cost-effective methods like computer matching. In fact, USDA has withheld federal funding for SFIS because the state cannot show that it is cost effective.
- California already uses an extensive computer matching system that cross-checks applicants' information against a number of statewide databases. If the state eliminates SFIS, this computer matching system will continue to provide a strong defense against multiple-aid fraud.
- Finger imaging adds a major hassle to the already lengthy and intimidating application process. All adult household members have to give their fingerprint – almost always during regular business hours – which means that most people have to take time off work to complete the requirement. Many low-income workers can't afford to take the time off, and as a consequence, they aren't able to get food stamps.
- By maintaining SFIS and other eligibility requirements that make it difficult for eligible, hungry people to put food on the table, California is turning away hundreds of millions of federal dollars. Right now, California receives over \$1.5 billion in food purchasing dollars that are spent immediately in local communities. Yet USDA has found that *only half of eligible Californians* are participating. Finger imaging is one significant reason for this low participation rate.