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March 14, 2014
Assemblywoman Connie Conway
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814
Via email: madeleine.stelzmillier@asm.ca.gov

Re: Opposition to AB 2354

Dear Assemblywoman Conway,

I am writing on behalf of California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) to express our opposition to AB 2354. We are a statewide policy advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food.

CalFresh provides nutrition assistance to individuals and families who cannot afford enough food. CalFresh benefits are delivered through the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system. For over twenty years, we've worked to strengthen CalFresh and ensure that nutrition benefits reach all eligible Californians. Recognizing the critical importance of these benefits, we appreciate current efforts to detect and deter fraud within CalFresh. These efforts are effective: across the county, fraud is at a historic low.

The proposed inclusion of photographs on EBT cards is unwarranted. The cost of implementing the requirement would very likely outstrip any fraudulent use of benefits that it intends to address. An EBT photograph requirement would also undermine efficiencies already established by county administrators who are increasing their use of online, out-of-the-office application and enrollment processes.

Mandating that EBT cardholders visit county social services offices to have their photographs taken would also unduly increase the burden on low-income Californians, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet while working one or more jobs. Because CalFresh is a household (rather than individual) benefit, an EBT photograph

requirement would mean that every member of a CalFresh household has to visit a county office during the enrollment process.

Given the historically low rates of fraud within CalFresh, public funds would be best spent on improvements that would help our state reach the 43 percent of eligible individuals not participating in CalFresh, including 56 percent of the eligible working poor throughout California.

The United State Department of Agriculture has shown that every dollar in SNAP expenditures generates \$1.79 in economic activity. If CalFresh reached all eligible individuals, California would receive an estimated \$3.5 billion in additional federal nutrition benefits each year. Those benefits would generate an estimated \$6.3 billion in additional economic activity per year. CalFresh helps low-income households meet their nutritional needs and exerts a multiplier effect that stimulates the economy at large.

CFPA envisions a healthy and food-secure California for all. Ensuring that eligible Californians have ready access to nutrition benefits is central to that vision – as is the advancement of efficient, effective policies affecting nutrition programs like CalFresh. AB 2354 would impair access to CalFresh for struggling Californians who are eligible for benefits. The bill would also increase the administrative burden on counties. For these reasons, we must oppose the changes put forth in AB 2354.



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