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March 23, 2015

Assemblymember Richard Gordon  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for AB 608

Dear Assemblymember Gordon,

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) supports AB 608 which would require County Human Services Agencies to provide low-income families with children applying for CalFresh with information regarding their eligibility for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).

CFPA is a statewide policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. One of CFPA's goals is to ensure that eligible Californians have access to and participate in the federal nutrition programs, including WIC, school meals and summer meals.

Children in households determined eligible for CalFresh are categorically eligible to receive free school meals. The state's existing direct certification system identifies, on a monthly basis, children in CalFresh households and certifies them to receive free school meals throughout the school year. However, the application for CalFresh eligibility can take up to 30 days to process. If the children in these CalFresh households are not already enrolled to receive free or reduced price meals, via paper application or direct certification, there is a possibility that they may be missing out on critical nutrition benefits. Additionally, families may not be aware of the free meals available through SFSP during the summer months. These meals are provided to low-income children in an effort to avoid hunger and food insecurity during school vacation and off-track periods.

Ultimately, CFPA envisions a system in which low-income children and their families do not need to actively pursue school meal enrollment, but rather are identified as free or reduced price eligible through existing mechanisms, such as direct certification. CFPA will continue to pursue improvements to California's direct certification system by, for example, including the use of Medi-Cal enrollment data for this purpose. Until then, the provision of information regarding school meals and the availability of

summer feedings sites as an addition to existing emergency food provider lists will keep families informed of the range of nutrition benefits available to them.

In order to provide an effective referral the information provided should be as up to date and accurate as possible. Many counties across California are home to a significant number of summer feeding sites, for example, Los Angeles County alone has had over 800 summer feeding sites. Maintaining up to date information on the details and location of each site can be arduous. For this reason, CFPA recommends the use of existing resources to identify summer feeding sites. One such resource is the California Department of Education's (CDE) Summer Meals Service Sites webpage. This webpage provides parents and referral agencies with a list of locations where children may receive free, nutritious meals during school vacation and off-track periods.

All California families should be well informed of the resources available to them. AB 608 makes progress toward this goal by expanding the requirement to provide CalFresh households a list of emergency food providers to include school meal enrollment information and details regarding local summer feeding sites. For these reasons CFPA supports AB 608 and requests your "aye" vote.

Sincerely,



Alexis Fernández  
Director of Legislation  
California Food Policy Advocates