



February 4, 2011

Nate Miley, President
Alameda County Board of Supervisors
1221 Oak Street
Oakland, CA 94612

Re: Support Restaurant Meals Program for CalFresh

Dear President Miley:

I am writing to encourage the Board to support development and implementation of a CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program in Alameda County.

As you know, CalFresh (the new state name for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly Food Stamps) is a federally-funded safety net that assists more than 43 million low-income Americans in meeting their food needs. While Alameda County has invested time and energy to improving access to the CalFresh Program, under-participation in the program continues. Regrettably, California has the worst participation rate among seniors, and the program nationally continues to under-enroll people who are homeless.

The federal law governing this program has long recognized that certain populations lack access to cooking facilities, making the standard program poorly suited for them. In 1978, the Restaurant Meals Program was designed to give states the option to allow elderly and disabled food stamp households to use food stamp coupons in authorized restaurants. In 1996, the program was expanded to include homeless food stamp households. Under the program, prepared foods at participating restaurants and grocery stores can be purchased with an EBT card. Participating restaurants must meet requirements placed on them by the county and must be authorized to process food stamp transactions as a restaurant. Restaurants are prohibited from charging a sales tax or meal tax on prepared foods purchased with food stamp benefits.¹

Although the Restaurant Meals Program has been operating in California for nearly a decade,² Alameda County has yet to implement this option. It is currently in

¹ 7 Code of Federal Regulations § 274.10

² Restaurant Meal Program Regulations: MPP §63-102(e)(2)(H); ACIN I-31-04



place in most metropolitan counties across the state including San Francisco, Los Angeles³ and Sacramento.

The elderly, disabled, and homeless often lack the facilities or the ability to store, prepare, or cook meals at home for themselves. This can discourage participation in the traditional CalFresh program, which is one reason why the CalFresh participation rate among eligible individuals within these groups frequently is below average.

The Restaurant Meals Program provides an important alternative that broadens food options for these vulnerable groups, and can boost CalFresh participation levels by making it easier for these eligible groups to use their benefits in ways that are a practical alternative for them. Increased participation not only helps to address hunger among those most at risk, but also provides an important source of federal dollars for the community. USDA research documents that each one dollar federal SNAP benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity.

I understand that you may have been contacted by members of the business community to reconsider the county's reluctance to implement the CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program. This is a policy that anti-hunger advocates have long supported. It is a proven way to help make food assistance more available to those most in need while providing added economic benefits in participating communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Edward Barnes
Practice Director

Cc: Supervisors Lockyer, Carson, Chan, Haggerty

³ http://www.ladpss.org/dpss/restaurant_meals/RMP_FAQ.cfm