



Responding to the College Hunger Crisis

New laws to prevent hunger from undermining college success among low-income College students in California

New research has emerged showing a high prevalence of food insecurity and hunger on California's College campuses. According to a recent report, the number of food banks springing up at university and college campuses is on the rise.ⁱ According to California State University (CSU), one in five CSU students experience hunger and one in ten experience homelessness.^{ii iii} ^{iv}In a survey recently conducted by the University of California Regents, it was found that one in five University of California (UC) students do not have access to adequate food or nutrition.^v Furthermore, nationwide lab reports show that half of all community college students are struggling with housing and/or food insecurity.^{vi}

A study conducted in 2013 of Pell Grant recipients at California State University Sacramento found that 23% of these high performing students from low-income families experience at least one day each month in which they go without food and 12% reported having unintentionally lost weight because they could not afford food. These findings are consistent with findings from other university research documenting a prevalence of hunger among college students, impeding graduation rates and learning.^{vii}

California has recently implemented several pieces of legislation which seek to prevent college student hunger by increasing access to CalFresh and ensure that the benefits may be used on College Campuses. These include Assembly Bill 214 (2017)^{viii} and Assembly Bill 1747 (2016),^{ix} authored by Dr. Shirley Weber, and Assembly Bill 1930, authored by (then) Assembly Member Nancy Skinner in 2014.^x Additionally, AB 453 (2017) by Assembly Member Monique Limón, to establish the Hunger Free Campus Initiative, was passed and funded in the 2017-18 Budget Act. These new laws provide the state with several new tools to draw down federal resources and aims to improve coordination between anti-hunger efforts on college campuses and anti-hunger efforts in the surrounding communities.^{xi} This paper lays out the challenges of college hunger and details how these new laws help to combat it. We also lay out what next steps are necessary in order to establish that no college student is ever undermined in their success because of something as easy to solve as college hunger.

The CalFresh Student Rules Hinder Access to Anti-Hunger Help

One of the reasons that low-income students, like those identified in the studies referenced above, are experiencing hunger is that federal food help available to most low-income Californians has proven difficult for them to access. CalFresh is California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp program, which provides federally funded food benefits for low-income people. Federal SNAP Law denies eligibility to a student unless they are working 20 hours a week or more^{xii} or eligible for one of

the exemptions to the rule as listed below. A student subject to the rule must be aged 18-50 and enrolled at least half-time, as defined by the school^{xiii} in an institute of “higher education”^{xiv} and enrolled in a “regular curriculum”.^{xv} A student is exempt from these rules if they are:

- Eligible for and anticipate working at a state or federal work-study job. The exemption begins the month the school term starts or the month work study is approved, whichever is later, and continues until the end of the month the school term ends;^{xvi} or
- A full-time student with a child under age 12; or Part-time student with a child under age six or a child between ages six and 12 for whom adequate care is not available; or
- Receiving a Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) Funded Benefit;
- Enrolled in a food stamp employment and training (FSET) program; or other state or local job training programs, as identified by the State and approved by the USDA.^{xvii}
- Does not intend to register for the next normal school term. ^{xviii}

If a student fails to qualify for an exemption to the student rule is not eligible for one of these exemptions and not working more than 20 hours per week, the student is ineligible and neither their income nor needs are considered in determining assistance for the household. When a student is working (but less than requisite 20 hours) the exclusion of a student may actually increase the benefit level for households in which there are other people who have little or no income.

New Laws Define Terms for Purposes of Implementing the CalFresh Student Rule

While the student rule has several exemptions, California had not implemented them. Without guidance for how to verify these exemptions, county agencies simply told students that if they were attending part time and were not working 20 hours per week, they simply weren’t eligible. Chaptered in 2014, Assembly Bill 1930 (D-Skinner) required the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to establish a work group to identify which “state or local job training programs” would exempt a college student from the student work rule. Additionally, it required that the Department issue guidance to counties about how to identify and verify participation in one of these programs. The work group, established in May 2015, went one step further and also issued guidance to counties about how to verify some of the other exemptions. The policies established subsequent to the workgroup were done so in three All County Letters (ACLs), which include a checklist for advocates and counties alike to assist a college student in screening for an exemption.^{xix} AB 214 codifies this work, and requires DSS to establish a process to identify programs that qualify for a student for an exemption.

Additionally, while the federal law only applies to college students attending half-time or more, in California, the rule had been applied to students participating less than half-time. This is because California had not established the definition of “half-time” in law. Instead, County Human Services Agencies were relying on the proxy of a part-time designation, which is less than half of what would be required for graduation in a 2-year or 4-year college, respectively. AB 214 corrected this overreach of the rule by defining, for the purposes of the CalFresh student rule, part-time. We estimate that approximately 4,000^{xx} low-income no longer considered half-time students, and no longer subject to the Calfresh Student Rule as a result.

Corrected an Oversight by Implementing the TANF Funded Benefit Exemption

It was through the AB 1930 workgroup that it was discovered that one exemption listed in federal law has not and could not be implemented due to lack of information on behalf of the

County Human Services Agency and the student. While federal law clearly states that a recipient of a TANF funded benefit should be exempt from the student rule, most students receiving such a benefit are not. Because TANF is a block grant, it can be used for various purposes provided that they support low-income Californians. California's legislature and Governors have budgeted the use of TANF block-grant dollars to support the Cal Grant program. This means that hundreds of thousands of low-income college students have been receiving a TANF funded benefit and exempt from the student rule – but neither they nor their County CalFresh Caseworker knew it. AB 214 established that the California Student Aid Commission shall notify, in writing, any recipient of a Cal Grant award whose grant includes any amount of funding that has been derived from the TANF block grant or state match in order for the student to verify that he or she qualifies for the exemption from the CalFresh program student eligibility rules.

New Opportunities to Use CalFresh EBT on College Campuses

According to recent research, approximately 10% of CSU students are homeless.^{xxi} New law established by AB 1747 and AB 214 created greater access to food on College Campuses for CalFresh recipients who are elderly, disabled or homeless by increasing the likelihood that restaurants or cafeterias on publicly funded campuses will participate in the Restaurant Meals Program.^{xxii} It did this by requiring that publicly funded colleges in Counties that participate in the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP)^{xxiii} to provide information to on-campus prepared food vendors about the program (giving them the option to apply as an approved restaurant). It would also require that if a public institution administers its own on-campus, publically funded prepared-food establishment (like a cafeteria) in a county that participates in RMP, that it apply to be approved as a certified food vendor in the program.^{xxiv} With this, any person who is a CalFresh recipient and is homeless, disabled or elderly, would have the ability to purchase a meal at the qualified prepared food vendor on campus.^{xxv} AB 214 simply clarified that this requirement does not apply to mobile food vendors as these vendors are not eligible to participate in the program. Legislation introduced this year, AB 1894 (Weber) would extend this program by allowing all CSU campuses to participate, regardless of whether or not they reside within an RMP participating county, by establishing the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the CSU Chancellor's Office and DSS.

California Establishes the First Hunger Free Campus Initiative

In 2017, Assembly Member Monique Limón introduced AB 453, which would have established the Hunger Free Campus Initiative. This bill was not passed, because it was, instead, passed in the Budget Act of 2017, with an appropriation of \$2.5 Million. The Hunger Free Campus initiative gives awards to public colleges that achieve the following objectives.

First, the CSUs and the UCs, but not the Community Colleges, must establish a “meal sharing” program. This vision was based off of a model established by *Swipe Out Hunger*^{xxvi} to reduce hunger on campus by activating college students to donate unused meal points to feed their peers and community members. The Hunger Free Campus initiative includes in requirements to be designated a “Hunger Free Campus,” that a campus establish a Swipe Out Hunger program, or similar meal sharing program, and designate a staff on campus to coordinate the program. It also required that the benefits of the program be first distributed for meal plan purchases by students who need them and then, remaining benefits to be donated to the on campus food pantry.

With access to CalFresh improving thanks to recently passed legislation, the Hunger Free Campus initiative ensures that college students will benefit from these new rules by increasing awareness of CalFresh on campus. It does so by requiring colleges funded through the program to make materials available on campus and designate a campus employee to serve as a point person for students, for the county and for community outreach providers.

Finally, because college students often have limited transportation options and community-based food resources are typically not located close to campuses or, though food insecure, might not meet community-based agency requirements of off-campus services, the Hunger Free Campus initiative requires campus-based food pantries to be made easily accessible and navigable for students.^{xxvii}

The three college sectors have been busily working with their college campuses to meet the requirements of the Hunger Free Campus designation and it is anticipated that they will use all of the funds made available to fight hunger on college campuses. Advocates are asking the Budget Committee to designate an additional year of funding for the Initiative.

Next Steps for California College Hunger Advocacy

If a low-income person has made it into college, it is because they are hard-working and have faced barriers that most people would never even imagine having to endure. They are our state's best and brightest and the state and federal governments will have invested significant resources in educational supports to support their attendance. We should not undermine their success or the government investment by taking the chance that hunger and economic deprivation will result in their dropping out. We should be proud of our work so far, but we shouldn't stop there. Below are the next steps for California college hunger advocacy:

- ***Fully Implement AB 1930 Workgroup Exemptions***

While we are very proud of the workgroup exemptions and checklist developed to support application of the exemptions, too many low-income students are not benefiting from the federal food assistance to which they are entitled because they are denied exemptions they qualify for. We recommend fully automating the checklist and ensuring worker training. Additionally, we will not see the impact of the TANF funded benefit exemption until the Commission on Student Aid amends their CalGrant Notice to include verification of receipt of the benefit so that students can secure the waiver.

- ***Further Clarification of the Student Work Study Exemption***

Federal SNAP law provides that a student eligible for and (at least) anticipates working at a state or federal work-study job, then they are exempt. AB 1930 and AB 214 established that work study status would be verified with a letter from the college that they were eligible and self-attestation that they did not turn down a work study job and anticipate being placed in a work study job at some point during the term. However, recent reports suggest that, as a result of this guidance, the College staff have changed the award letter in a way that prevents a person who is eligible and anticipates working a work study job from receiving the waiver of the student rule that they are entitled to. College Chancellors should work with student and faculty to establish a uniform process that maximizes participation of students eligible under federal law.

- ***Further Clarification of Last Term Exemption & Summer Status***

The federal law is clear that a person shall only be considered a student if they are attending school half-time or more. It also says that a person shall not be subject to the student rule in the program if they do not intend to attend college during the next term. These rules have also been made in several All County Letters (ACLs). It is unclear why this is not being implemented correctly at the worker level, but clarification for workers should be easily achievable.

- ***Continue Establishing EBT on College Campuses***

Public colleges across the state have been busy implementing AB 1747 and AB 214 to establish an RMP on every public college campus, but doing so has brought a great learning curve for college administrators and SNAP administrators alike. Legislation introduced this year by Assembly Member Dr. Shirley Weber would allow all CSU campuses participate in the RMP.^{xxviii} Colleges should continue to implement these laws and take it one step further to secure access of surcharge-free cash EBT and grocery EBT on campus too (currently two public colleges have achieved approval of their on-campus grocery store in California). Finally, campuses should also be seeking to secure on-campus farmer's markets that accept EBT payments, several colleges have reported doing so throughout the state.

- ***Reach for Higher Hunger Fighting Goals***

While CalFresh is a really important tool to resolve college campus hunger, it isn't the only tool. Senator Henry Stern has introduced a bill that would create the Plan Against College Hunger (PACH)^{xxix} to be administered by the Student Aid Commission which, once adequately funded, would be used to award a college meal plan, worth 10 meals per week, to public college and university students who are low-income.

- ***Secure Additional Funding for the Hunger Free Campus***

Anti-hunger advocates around the state can already notice the improved access to information and emergency food distributions on campus as a result of the Hunger Free Campus initiative. It is important that this effort is supported and that additional general fund issued in order to protect the investment in ending hunger on college campuses.

Partnerships Work! None of these victories would be possible without our partners who identified the problem, mobilized for solutions and are working towards successful implementation and identifying next steps. They are:



Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations; MAZON A Jewish Response to Hunger; Young Invincibles, West Coast; Student Senate for California Community Colleges; California State Student Association; Swipe Out Hunger and, University of California Student Association

For more information about Western Center's Anti-Hunger work, please see our website at www.wclp.org, or contact: Jessica Bartholow at jbartholow@wclp.org or 916-282-5119.

Endnotes

i “More College Students Battle Hunger As Education and Cost of Living Costs Rise,” The Washington Post, April 9, 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/more-college-students-battle-hunger-as-education-and-living-costs-rise/2014/04/09/60208db6-bb63-11e3-9a05-c739f29ccb08_story.html

ii Source: <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-cal-state-homelessness-20160620-snap-story.html>

iii Serving Displaced and Food Insecure Students in the CSU (Feb 2016): <https://presspage-production-content.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/1487/cohomelessstudy.pdf?10000>

iv In Cal State universities, 42% of students are food insecure and 11% are homeless. https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/BasicNeedsStudy_phaseII_withAccessibilityComments.pdf

v Student Food Security and Access,” <http://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/july16/e1attach.pdf>

This report was made possible by funding from the University of California (UC) Office of the President Global Food Initiative. For more information about this initiative, visit: www.ucop.edu/global-food-initiative.

vi Source: http://wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin_hope_lab_hungry_to_learn.pdf

vii A University of Oregon conducted this year found that 59 percent of students at Western Oregon University had recently experienced food insecurity. The figure was 21 percent in a 2009 report on students at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

viii http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB214

ix AB 1747 was sponsored by the UC Student Association, San Diego Hunger Advocacy Network, The Young Invincibles and Western Center on Law and Poverty. It was implemented by *CDSS ACL 16-112*. The text of the bill can be found at: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB1747

x AB 1930 (Skinner – 2014) Chaptered in 2011, implemented by ACL 15-70 (September 17, 2015), ACIN 1-89-15 (December 31, 2015), and AB 17-05 (Feb 14, 2017), was sponsored by the California Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations (CCWRO) and Western Center on Law and Poverty. Text of the bill can be found at:

http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB1930

xi For a look into advocacy efforts by students themselves, see “A Plate at the Table: Student Stories and Recommendations regarding Hunger and Basic Needs Insecurity”, published by the University of California Student Associations and Accessible at <http://ucsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Report-A-Plate-At-The-Table.pdf>

xii USDA granted a waiver to CDSS allowing them to use reasonably anticipated monthly average of work [[ACL 12-37](#)];

xiii 7 C.F.R. § 273.5(a); MPP §§ 63-406.1 and .21.

xiv 7 C.F.R. § 273.5(a); MPP §§ 63-406.1 and .21. Higher education institutes are either: business, trade, technical or vocational schools that normally requires a high school diploma or GED to enroll – only half time enrollment matters; or A junior, community, two-year or four-year college or university, or graduate school, whether or not a high school diploma or GED is required.

xv MPP § 63-406.111(a)(2). If the program or course (as opposed to the college) does not require a diploma or GED, the student bar would not apply. [MPP § 63-406.111(a)(2)(A); 60 Fed.Reg. 48865-69.] Regular curriculum means that the course in which the person is enrolled meets the standard requirements for graduation or certification/qualification in a particular field of study. [MPP § 63-406.]

xvi MPP § 63-406.212

xvii 7 C.F.R. § 273.5(b)(11).

xviii 7 C.F.R. § 273.5(c). See ACIN I-36-12 for treatment of applicants declaring intent not to reenroll.

xix [ACL 15-70 \(September 17, 2015\)](#), which represents the first step in implementing [AB 1930 \(Skinner\)](#), co-sponsored by Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, requiring CDSS to identify programs that would qualify college students for exemptions from the CalFresh Student Work Rule. [ACL 17-05 \(February 14, 2017\)](#) establishes list of programs that qualify someone for an exemption to the student work rule.

xx Using data from CSU, we estimate 16, 575 students would fall under the threshold of “half-time” established by the bill. If, according to research done by CSU and UC, ¼ of students are low-income, we would estimate 4,000 of these students are low-income and potentially eligible (depending on immigration status) for the program.

xxi Serving Displaced and Food Insecure Students in the CSU (Feb 2016): <https://presspage-production-content.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/1487/cohomelessstudy.pdf?10000>

xxii Restaurant Meal Program Guidance: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/CalFresh/Restaurant-Meals-Program>
Restaurant Meal Primer (old but still helpful): <http://www.sachousingalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/RestaurantMealsProgramFinal.pdf>

xxiii Ending Hunger Through the CalFresh Restaurant Meal Program, a factsheet by Jessica Bartholow:

http://wclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Restaurant_Meals_Program_Factsheet_Restaurant_Meals_WCLP.pdf
and RMP Primer <http://wclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/YGA-12161-SNAP-doc1-1.pdf>

xxiv AB 1747 (Weber) implementation guide by WCLP: <http://wclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/AB-1747-Weber-Implementation-Guide-Colleges-in-RMP-Participating-Counties.pdf>

xxv Other resources for the Restaurant Meal Program:

<http://www.ebtproject.ca.gov/clientinformation/calfreshrmp.shtml>;

<http://wclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Primer.pdf>; <http://www.snaprmp.org/local-resources.html>

xxvi More about Swipe Out Hunger here: <http://www.swipehunger.org/timeline>

xxvii More about on-campus food pantries can be found here: <http://www.cufba.org/>

xxviii http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB1894

xxix http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180SB1275