

Item 10

(Information Item)

Update on CalFresh Workgroup

SUMMARY:

This item provides an update on the progress of the CalFresh Workgroup convened by the California Student Aid Commission (Commission). The CalFresh Workgroup exists to develop strategies and policy solutions that will streamline and expand college student access to CalFresh benefits.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information item; no action is necessary.

BACKGROUND:

CalFresh Workgroup

The Commission is committed to finding new ways to support California postsecondary students by identifying solutions to fill the gap in their unmet financial need. Our commitment to addressing college affordability issues has taken on greater urgency in the wake of COVID-19. Tackling food insecurity for college students must be made a priority to help them persist and succeed in college.

The CalFresh Program offers critical resources that can help offset the food costs for students, yet most students do not apply. The [Senate Bill 77 CalFresh Student Data Report](#) released by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in June 2020 estimated that 400,000 to 700,000 college students are potentially eligible for federal CalFresh benefits, but only about 127,000 students receive these resources each year.

Since September 2020, the CalFresh Workgroup – consisting of Commissioners, agency staff, researchers, practitioners, institutional representatives, and legislative staff – has been meeting monthly to identify short- and long-term strategies to streamline and expand college student access to CalFresh benefits. The second attachment, ***CalFresh Workgroup : Summary of Short and Long-Term Policy Strategies***, provides an overview of the short- and long-term strategies the CalFresh Workgroup is exploring. With the assistance of WestEd, the Commission will release a report summarizing the Workgroup findings and policy recommendations in the Spring.

Ongoing Commission Efforts on CalFresh

One of the exemptions to the SNAP Student Eligibility Rule is receipt of a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefit. The Commission's Cal Grant program is

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partially funded by TANF dollars meaning that recipients of TANF-funded Cal Grant A or B tuition award are exempt from the Student Eligibility Rule and therefore can qualify for CalFresh. Pursuant to [Assembly Bill 214](#) (Chapter 134, Statutes of 2017), the Student Aid Commission is required to provide written notice to recipients of Cal Grant awards who qualify for participation in the CalFresh program. The [letter](#) that a student receives from the Commission can serve as verification for the county application process that the student is a recipient of a TANF-funded Cal Grant and is therefore eligible for CalFresh benefits with an exemption from the work requirement. It is important to note that community college students cannot currently benefit from a TANF-funded Cal Grant tuition award because community college students only receive Cal Grant aid through the Cal Grant B Access Award.

Furthermore, in response to the temporary federal SNAP expansion for zero EFC students that was included in recent federal COVID-19 relief ([H.R. 133, Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021](#)), we are currently in the process of sending letters to approximately 300,000 students statewide that qualify for this temporary exemption. These electronic letters serve as proof of a student's zero EFC status and encourage students to apply for CalFresh.

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):

Marlene L. Garcia
Executive Director

Melissa Bardo, Legislative Analyst
Government and External Relations

ATTACHMENT(S):

CalFresh Workgroup: Summary of Short and Long-Term Policy Strategies