

# Item 10

## (Information Item)

### Update on new released CalFresh Report

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#### **SUMMARY:**

The California Student Aid Commission (Commission) has just released a long-anticipated report -- Access to Nutrition Equals College Success: Making CalFresh work for students. This report is the culmination of a year-long examination and workgroup review of issues that impede student access to CalFresh benefits. The report offers a set of policy recommendations and solutions that address many of the systemic barriers students face when attempting to access nutrition benefits. This item will provide an update on the various events and activities underway to promote the release of the report and recommendations.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

This is an information item; no action is required.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Numerous studies have documented that food insecurity is a widespread and growing challenge at our colleges and universities. Through our student surveys, the Commission has found that 1 of 3 students report being food insecure. COVID-19 has only exacerbated these challenges.

Relatively few eligible college students receive CalFresh benefits for which they qualify. While data is limited in this area, the California Department of Social Services issued a report in February 2020 on the number of students estimated to receive CalFresh. They found that only about 127,000 students received benefits out of an estimated 400,000 to as many as 750,000 students who were likely eligible. This data was collected prior to COVID-19. The number of students eligible for CalFresh benefits has likely grown since the onset of the pandemic.

The Commission convened a work group in the Fall of 2020 that included students, campus basic needs leaders, research experts, and staff from county agencies to help better understand why students are not accessing this benefit and identify the means through which we can better connect them to CalFresh support. Below is a summary of major barriers students face when accessing CalFresh benefits.

In the 1970's federal law and regulations were specifically structured to keep students out of the SNAP Program, requiring students to meet additional qualifications known as the "Student Rule exemptions" in order to apply.

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For years Student Rule exemptions put an extra “burden of proof” on students to not only apply and meet the financial eligibility requirements that any other applicant does, but to also demonstrate and ensure that their county recognizes their exemption from the student rule.

Another challenge is that students are a mobile population. They often move from one county to another as they transition to postsecondary education. This makes a county-based system and its complicated mechanisms for transferring cases a major challenge, making it hit-or-miss whether the case ever arrives at the county of the student’s college campus.

Additionally, the nature of the academic year and the timing of students moving into a new county creates large and recurring seasonal surges in applications. As the Fall academic term begins, many counties with large student populations see a wave of applications hit them at the same time. This creates real workload issues for staff that result in longer processing times for student applicants.

Finally, each time there is a change in policy on how student applications are processed, whether resulting from federal or state guidance, the agencies in all 58 counties must be notified and trained to implement the new changes. This often results in inconsistent implementation of changes. During the pandemic, for example, several new emergency changes have been implemented temporarily to ease the process for students to access much needed food benefits, such as allowing for students to self-certify their exemption from the student rule. Many counties have struggled to keep up with implementing new changes.

The report offers a series of actionable recommendations that address many of the systemic barriers that have kept postsecondary education students out of the CalFresh program. The report recommends establishing two pilot projects that test new approaches for streamlining and opening student access to CalFresh benefits. Additionally, the report contains fourteen short and long-term recommendations categorized as requiring either state or the federal action.

### Final Report Roll-Out:

- The report was first previewed to a select group of capitol staffers and other policy leaders at a capitol briefing on Tuesday, January 25<sup>th</sup>. More than 30+ attendees joined the capitol briefing and several followed up later with requests for more information.
- Jake Brymner, Director of Government and External Relations testified before the Assembly Budget Subcommittee 1 on Health & Human Services on February 23<sup>rd</sup> and the Assembly Budget Subcommittee 2 on Education Finance on March 1<sup>st</sup> to discuss the CalFresh report and its findings. The report has generated strong interest from members of the Legislature and the Administration.
- Commission Chair Catalina Cifuentes, Compton President Keith Currey and Executive Director Marlene Garcia led a panel discussion on the need for greater

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student access to CalFresh benefits and key recommendations from the report at the annual Basic Needs Summit, hosted by the Community College League of California on Friday, February 4<sup>th</sup>.

- The Commission will be hosting a webinar to review the full report in the next few weeks (final date TBD). Currently, Ruben Canedo, the Director of Strategic Initiatives at University of California at Berkeley, Nolan Sullivan with Yolo County Health and Human Services, and Jasmine Prasad, the Vice President of Legislative Affairs with the Student Senate of CA Community Colleges will be panelists to discuss student hunger on campuses, and the report's recommended solutions to address this crisis.
- The Commission, in collaboration with WestEd, is launching an extensive outreach, marketing and communications strategy to widely promote the report and its findings. The Commission has solicited quotes from a number of elected officials, segment leaders and other advocates and workgroup members to tout the findings and recommendations. The Commission and WestEd are distributing a press release, developing a social media campaign distributing newsletters announcing the release of the CalFresh Report.

### RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):

Marlene L. Garcia  
Executive Director

### ATTACHMENT(S):

CalFresh Final Workgroup Report -- Access to Proper Nutrition Equals College Success: Making CalFresh Work for Students

New CalFresh Report Presentation Presented on March 10, 2022