



Senator Scott Wiener, 11th Senate District

Senate Bill 900 - California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot

SUMMARY

SB 900 creates the California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project, which aims to make California-grown fresh fruits and vegetables more affordable for low-income families by allowing CalFresh recipients to earn extra CalFresh funds when they purchase California-grown fruits and vegetables.

SB 900 can improve the health of CalFresh recipients, save lives and bring down long-term healthcare costs. It will also support our local economy by encouraging the purchase of produce grown right here in California at grocery stores and farmers markets.

BACKGROUND/EXISTING LAW

Federal law provides food aid for people with a net income of at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (which is \$1,702 for a family of three) through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as CalFresh in California. CalFresh is primarily a federal program that is administered by the California Department of Social Services (DSS) and county human services agencies.

There are several supplemental benefits programs operating successfully within California. Under many of these programs, CalFresh recipients are provided with matching dollars when they buy California-grown fruits and vegetables. The programs are funded with a mix of public and private grants.

PROBLEM

Monthly CalFresh benefits are inadequate to support the purchase of nutritious foods that are needed for a healthy diet, particularly fruits and vegetables. The average monthly CalFresh benefit is less than \$140 per person.

Studies have shown that increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables CalFresh participants purchase would save lives and costs over time. One study found that reducing the cost of fruits and vegetables would significantly reduce cardiovascular disease mortality. Another study found that subsidies for fruit and vegetable purchases through SNAP would be cost saving from a societal perspective, primarily due to the long-term reductions in type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Early attempts at fruit and vegetable supplemental benefit programs have been popular and effective, but they can be cumbersome, requiring recipients and retailers to utilize paper coupons or tokens, rather than simply relying on the CalFresh EBT card (the usual way of using these benefits).

SOLUTION

SB 900 requires the Department of Social Services (DSS) to program CalFresh EBT (electronic benefit transfer) cards to allow CalFresh recipients to receive supplemental benefits when they purchase California-grown fresh fruits and vegetables. It also requires DSS to provide a minimum of three grants to nonprofit and community organizations to create pilot programs to implement and test this supplemental benefits program at grocery stores and farmers' markets.

By testing out ways to place supplemental benefits directly on recipients' EBT cards, the state will create technology that can easily scale, allowing many more CalFresh recipients to easily use the benefit, and increasing sales of fresh produce grown in California.

After the pilots are completed, SB 900 requires DSS to submit recommendations to the legislature on how to further refine and expand supplemental benefits.

SUPPORT

San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban
Research Association (SPUR) (co-sponsor)
California Food Policy Advocates (co-sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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