



Senator Scott Wiener, 11th Senate District

Senate Bill 882 – CalFresh Telephonic Access

SUMMARY

SB 882 would simplify the CalFresh application process for older adults and people with disabilities by removing onerous reporting requirements that frequently cause households to lose food assistance despite sustained eligibility. The bill would require the Department of Social Services to implement the federal Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) under its existing CalFresh program. ESAP seeks to increase participation by streamlining the application and recertification process for elderly and disabled households with no earned income. This bill will also set a timeline for all counties to offer Californians the ability to apply for and recertify their CalFresh benefits entirely over the phone.

BACKGROUND/EXISTING LAW

Current law, under the 2008 Food and Nutrition Act (FNA), states that the CalFresh certification period shall not exceed 24 months if all adult household members are elderly or disabled. CalFresh waives the standard 12 month recertification process to 24 months for elder and disabled individuals. However, considering that only 19 percent of eligible adults over the age of 60 are served by CalFresh, rising eligibility is not consistent with participation rates in the program. Although the CalFresh program extends the recertification process for elderly and disabled people, the declining number of beneficiaries proves the waiver is not user friendly enough.

The number of older Californians experiencing hunger continues to grow at an alarming rate. Hunger in elder and disabled adults has increased 21 percent in the last 15 years. Though the existing waiver allows them an extended recertification filing period, time is still a significant barrier.

Individuals who are unable to meet the 24 month recertification mandate often lose their benefits, pushing them further into food insecurity.

Currently, CalFresh does not provide applicants and beneficiaries the option to complete telephonic interviews for certification, which further hinders elder and disabled people from completing vital requirements.

PROBLEM

More than 4 million low-income households are food insecure, having limited, inconsistent, or uncertain access to food. With nearly forty percent of low-income Californians over the age of sixty struggling with hunger, food insecurity particularly affects the elderly. However, the impact of senior hunger extends well beyond empty pockets and stomachs. When applying for benefits and recertifying their information, they are met with the overly burdensome application and recertification process of existing CalFresh procedures.

Elderly and disabled households are historically underserved groups and are particularly susceptible to losing their food benefits. They face many hurdles in order to participate in CalFresh. These hurdles can vary from limited mobility, minimal access to electronic equipment, and inability to travel to their interviews, hindering their ability to submit critical information or attend interviews. CalFresh procedures must account for barriers in order to address the food insecurity crisis among these groups. With our population becoming older and less food secure, now is the time to act.

SOLUTION

SB 882 will improve the reach of CalFresh through increased county and state collaboration aimed at successful enrollment outcomes. The

bill seeks to improve CalFresh effectiveness by supporting elder and disabled households, removing barriers to accessing services, and implementing a telephonic application and certification system. SB 882 would require all counties using the CalWIN benefit system to offer full telephonic applications and recertifications by 2022 and would require all other counties to make telephonic applications available by 2023.

SB 882 would ease the recertification process for elderly and disabled households by extending the period between benefit recertification from 24 months to 36 months. This bill also waives an initial certification and recertification interview requirement that is a barrier to enrollment. Lastly, SB 882 requires the CalFresh program to provide senior and disabled applicants with a simpler, two page application form, making it more user friendly for them to navigate.

SUPPORT

- California Food Policy Advocates (Sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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