June 24, 2013

The Honorable Raul Bocanegra
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0039

Re: AB 191 (Bocanegra) CalFresh - SUPPORT

Dear Assemblyman Bocanegra:

On behalf of First 5 LA, I am writing to state our support for AB 191, which would improve alignment between CalFresh and Medi-Cal in an effort to ensure that low-income households receiving health benefits also receive nutrition benefits.

First 5 LA is a child advocacy and grantmaking organization created by California voters to invest Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues in health care, early education and child development programs for L.A. County children from the prenatal stage to age 5 and their families. One of First 5 LA’s policy goals, is increasing access to healthy food options and physical activity, an aim of the CalFresh program.

AB 191 would make low-income households with a Medi-Cal recipient (with income up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level, FPL) categorically eligible for CalFresh. Currently, in order to qualify for CalFresh benefits, individuals must satisfy two tests, a gross and net income test. The current gross income test threshold is 130 percent FPL. If an applicant satisfies this test, certain deductions can be applied to the applicant’s income to determine their “net” income. Applicants whose “net” income is below 100 percent FPL after the deductions are applied then qualify for CalFresh benefits.

AB 191 would raise the CalFresh “gross” income test to 200 percent for Medi-Cal recipients, which would better connect these two services. A significant number of individuals receiving Medi-Cal are unaware that their household may also be eligible for CalFresh. In addition, some households with a Medi-Cal recipient may be ultimately eligible for CalFresh after taking into account certain expenses such as child care, but have a gross income above the current limit. As a result, the CalFresh gross income test is preventing otherwise eligible households with high need and high expenses from accessing these benefits.
The fundamental goal of CalFresh is to reduce food insecurity and improve access to nutritious foods. This is vital for young children and their families as the positive impacts of CalFresh on these children can be substantial. In addition to addressing the immediate hunger and nutrition needs of vulnerable children, a recent National Bureau on Economic Research paper found that access to food stamp benefits (CalFresh) in early childhood correlated to long term positive outcomes in those children’s adult years including higher educational attainment, increased income, lower poverty rates and lower public assistance participation levels.

AB 191 would help needy California families already receiving Medi-Cal gain access to the CalFresh benefits they often qualify to receive. For these reasons, First 5 LA supports this bill.

We are grateful for your leadership on this issue, and hope you will consider First 5 LA a resource in your efforts to move the legislation forward. If we can be of further assistance, please contact Tessa Charnofsky, Government Affairs Manager, at TCharnofsky@First5LA.org.

Sincerely,

Kim Belshé
Executive Director

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cc: California Senate Committee on Human Services