July 19, 2013

The Honorable Senator Leno
California State Senate
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 672 (Leno) CalFresh: eligibility: guidelines - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Leno:

On behalf of First 5 LA, I am writing to express our support for SB 672, which would help increase CalFresh utilization by simplifying verification of dependent care expenses for eligible working families.

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 Los Angeles County children from the prenatal stage to age 5 and their families. First 5 LA champions health, education and safety causes concerning young children and families. Our policy priorities include increasing access to healthy food options for young children.

California’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), CalFresh, plays a vital role in helping low-income families access healthful foods. Unfortunately, the program is severely underutilized; only half of Californians eligible to participate in CalFresh are currently enrolled. Participation among eligible working families is even lower. Among the reasons cited for this underutilization is the cumbersome verification process for families seeking the child care deduction.

Currently, families applying to the program are allowed to deduct certain expenses, such as dependent child care costs, from their income in order to determine whether they are eligible for benefits. Federal guidance allows for a simplification of the dependent care deduction, including self-verification, a practice several other states are employing. However, California currently has not taken advantage of this flexibility. SB 672 would make it easier for applicants to utilize the child care deduction by directing the Department of Social Services to issue guidance that would allow low-income families applying for CalFresh to self-report child care expenses, in accordance with federal law.
SB 672 would help California optimize its utilization of federal SNAP funding, while also providing a means for low-income working families to secure healthful food options for their children. For these reasons, First 5 LA supports SB 672 and thanks you for introducing this legislation. If we can be of further assistance, please contact Tessa Charnofsky, Government Affairs Manager, at TCharnofsky@First5LA.org.

Sincerely,

Kim Belshé
Executive Director

cc: Assembly Committee on Human Services
    California Food Policy Advocates