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ADVOCATES PUSH FOR COMBINED SSI-FOOD STAMP APPLICATION

Combined application procedures for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Food Stamp Program can alleviate hunger among the elderly and disabled, according to a report just issued by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), a Washington, D.C. based advocacy organization. The report, *A Guide to the Supplemental Security Income/Food Stamp Program Combined Application Projects*, describes the various project models that states are currently using to increase food stamp participation among the elderly, tells how states can participate, and makes recommendations for improvements.

SSI is a federal program that provides income support for low-income people who are either 65 years or older, blind, or disabled. Although the majority of SSI recipients are "categorically" or automatically eligible for the Food Stamp Program, the report notes that it can still be very difficult for seniors and persons with disabilities to get help because of transportation problems, difficulties navigating the food stamp application process, or feelings of shame and stigma associated with asking for help. Due to these factors, traditionally, seniors and persons with disabilities have had low Food Stamp Program participation rates. In FY 2001, the most recent

year with available participation data, only twenty-eight percent of eligible seniors received food stamps, and only forty-nine percent of eligible disabled nonelderly adults received food stamps. These rates are significantly below the overall FSP participation rate of nearly sixty percent.

The Food Stamp Program/SSI Combined Application Projects (CAPs) are state demonstration programs that aim to increase Food Stamp Program participation among recipients of SSI. These state projects attempt to increase food stamp participation among recipients of SSI by combining applications for the two programs.

The exact details of each state's demonstration are slightly different, but the general procedures are similar: when clients qualify for and enroll in SSI, they are asked at the Social Security Administration (SSA) office if they would like food stamps. If they accept, their relevant information is directly downloaded to the state Food Stamp Program (via the State Data Exchange, described below). Then, their new food stamp benefits are generated, automatically or by hand. Food stamp benefits are issued, and sent to the recipient. No actual recipient contact with the food stamp office is necessary.

South Carolina was the first state to develop what is called the "Standard CAP" model. Mississippi, Washington, and New York operate under the original South Carolina CAP model.

In addition, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Massachusetts have recently been approved as new Standard CAP demonstrations, but will not begin operation until at least late 2004.

Participation in the Standard CAPs is limited to single individuals living alone, or single individuals living with others but paying a fair share of food and shelter costs. Married couples cannot currently participate in the Standard CAPs. In addition to enrolling new clients, the Standard CAP states also seek to enroll existing SSI participants who do not already receive food stamps. In order to do this, they send letters and do outreach to these eligible SSI recipients.

The Texas demonstration runs under a different model the "Modified" CAP model which does not involve overt cooperation with SSA offices. Instead of automatically certifying SSI recipients for food stamps using SSI data sent directly from SSA, the Texas food stamp agency requests the names of new SSI recipients from SSA and identifies those SSI recipients who are eligible for the Simplified Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The state food stamp agency itself then sends those recipients greatly simplified food stamp applications with a few straightforward, easy-to-answer questions. The client must then complete that form and return it to the food stamp office. Benefits are issued, and sent to the recipient. Married couples can participate in the Texas model, but they are treated as two separate households. Currently, only SSI recipients who are sixty five years or older can participate in the Texas model, but this limitation may change in the future.

Sixteen more states have recently been approved to use the Modified CAP model. Those states will be rolled out in four phases, spaced six to nine months apart, beginning in late 2003. The groups are as follows:

- Phase 1- Illinois, North Carolina, Kentucky, Louisiana, and New Jersey;
- Phase 2 - Alabama, Wisconsin, Arizona, and

Connecticut;

- Phase 3 - Kansas, Utah, Idaho, and South Dakota; and
- Phase 4 - Maryland, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.

The new Modified CAP states are given the choice to serve only SSI recipients over the age of sixty-five (like the current Texas system), or all SSI recipients. It is not yet determined whether new Modified CAPs will be able to serve couples (like the current Texas system), or only individuals.

Preliminary evidence from an evaluation of the demonstration project in South Carolina suggests that the projects are effective. An increasing number of states are undertaking such projects. In Texas, officials report reviewing and certifying 65,998 clients for SNAP, between September 2002 and August 2003.

To view the report, with information on model SSI/Food Stamp projects, visit www.frac.org/pdf/CAPreport.pdf.

FEDERAL UPDATE ON CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

On Tuesday, January 20th, Members of Congress returned to Capitol Hill for the President's State of the Union Address and a condensed legislative calendar. While the timetable and process for child nutrition reauthorization is still to be determined, some legislative action is expected by March 31st, when the temporary child nutrition program extension (pursuant to H.R. 3232) expires.

To expand access to nutrition programs, additional funding would need to be included in the budget proposals. A summary compiled of the President's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2005 and its impact on Nutrition Programs com-

piled by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is reprinted below.

Summary of the President's budget proposal:

Child Nutrition Programs - The President's budget anticipates that the child nutrition programs will be reauthorized in 2004, but contains no funds to expand program access. The budget fully funds the child nutrition programs and provides for the extension of a number of expiring provisions, including the participation of for-profit child care centers in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), so that all aspects of the programs can operate without interruption. The budget also makes unelaborated references to improvements in child nutrition program integrity and the nutritional quality of meals.

Food Stamp Program - The budget contains a Food Stamp Program reserve of \$3 billion as a cushion for meeting increased participation. It assumes as a goal reducing the average payment error rate in the program to 7.4 percent for 2005 (compared with an 8.3 percent rate in 2002). The budget also proposes to exclude combat-related pay when determining food stamp benefits for members of the armed forces.

WIC - The President's budget requests \$4.868 billion for the Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC) in fiscal year 2005. This is described as an increase of \$198 million in budget authority and \$86 million in program funds above fiscal year 2004 levels. The budget estimates that the proposed fiscal year 2005 funding level of \$4.8 billion will allow WIC to serve a monthly average of 7.86 million participants. The \$125 million contingency fund remains available and the funding level for fiscal year 2005 assumes that it is not used in fiscal year 2004.

WIC receives an increase in special project funds in the President's budget: \$5 million for

childhood obesity prevention projects (\$1 million increase); \$20 million to support peer counseling breastfeeding promotion initiatives (\$5 million increase); \$20 million to improve management information systems (\$5 million decrease); and \$7 million for studies to evaluate the effectiveness of WIC.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) - The Administration proposes to cut the Commodity Supplemental Food Program by 12 million dollars - from \$110 million to \$98 million. (The cut is, in reality, much greater since CSFP had carryover funding from FY03 to help meet projected caseloads for FY04. That additional carryover funding has been expended and there is no projected carryover funding for FY05.)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) - The budget would continue the Emergency Food Assistance Program at FY 2004 levels.

Farmers Market Nutrition Program - The budget proposal shows a \$7 million decrease in funding for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program - from \$27 million to \$20 million.

Community Food and Nutrition Program (CFNP) - Funding for the Community Food and Nutrition Program is "zeroed-out" in this budget.

For the full FY 2005 budget report, go to www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/budget.html. A White House summary of the Agriculture budget is available at www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/pdf/budget/agriculture.pdf. Detailed budget estimates for the Dept. of Agriculture are available at www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/pdf/appendix/agr.pdf. For additional information about budget proposals and reauthorization, visit www.frac.org.

USDA ANNOUNCES \$6 MILLION IN FOOD STAMP PROGRAM OUTREACH AND ACCESS GRANT SOLICITATIONS

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced the availability of up to \$6 million in two Food Stamp Program grant competitions to improve access to and awareness of USDA's Food Stamp Program for low-income households. Grant solicitations will be available to state and local government agencies and private non-profit organizations to simplify food stamp application and eligibility systems and to small community and faith based organizations to conduct food stamp outreach. The grants are part of the Bush Administration's commitment to make it easier for the working poor, immigrants and elderly to access food stamp benefits.

"Providing nutrition assistance to eligible families is a top priority for the Bush Administration," said Veneman. "Partnerships with state governments as well as private, non-profit groups including faith-based and community organizations helps give families needed nutrition assistance and builds on President Bush's commitment to improve services directed at reducing poverty and helping people in need. These grants also build on President Bush's commitment to increasing access to federal grants under his Faith Based and Community Initiative."

In an effort to improve access to food stamp benefits by eligible households, the 2002 Farm Bill authorized USDA to award \$5 million in grants for projects aimed at simplifying the food stamp application and eligibility systems or improving access to food stamp benefits by eligible households. USDA intends to award at least \$1 million out of the \$5 million to a partnership between a State agency and one or more private non-profit organizations, including faith or community-based organizations.

In a separate competition, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) plans to award up to \$1 million to private nonprofit organizations or public agencies other than food stamp state agencies to conduct food stamp outreach to potential food stamp participants. Grantees will implement community-based outreach strategies that educate people about the benefits of food stamps and show potential for positive impact on participation. USDA will encourage small community and faith-based organizations to participate in this competition.

The Food Stamp Program, administered by FNS, is the cornerstone of federal nutrition assistance programs and provides crucial support to working poor and needy households. The program serves more than 23 million people, and currently reaches about 60 percent of those who are eligible to receive benefits.

"USDA's nutrition assistance programs are an important safety net for those in need," said Veneman. "These grants provide another opportunity to improve access for low-income Americans to a nutritious diet."

All completed applications must be received on or before 5 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, May 7, 2004. Any questions about the request for proposal or the grant application process should be directed to Lynn Rodgers at 703/305-2760, or via e-mail at lynn.Rodgers@fns.usda.gov.

Additional information can be found online at www.grants.gov or on the FNS website at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp.

The Food Journal welcomes your comments and ideas for stories. To contact us, please call 462-2555 ext. 203, or e-mail comments and suggestions to foodjournal@tacao.org.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- The Alan Shawn Feinstein Foundation in Rhode Island will divide \$1 million among non-profit agencies throughout the country helping to fight hunger, using it to help them raise funds during March and April. Each participating agency will get their share of the \$1 million equal to their proportion of the total amount raised by all participants. Agencies wishing to participate should inform their donors, stating that the more of a donation they make to their agency from March 1st to April 30th—the more of the Feinstein money will be added to their donation. Donations of cash, checks or food items can be reported. To participate in the Feinstein challenge, visit www.feinsteinfoundation.com/ for additional information.
- The Community Food Projects (CFP) Competitive Grants Program provides approximately \$4.6 million in grant funds that will be available in 2004. Proposals are due April 14, 2004. The CFP Program supports projects that help meet the food needs of low-income people, increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs, and promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm, and nutrition issues, and/or meet specific state, local, or neighborhood food and agriculture needs for infrastructure improvement and development, long-term planning, or the creation of innovative marketing activities that mutually benefit agricultural producers and low-income consumers. For additional information, go to www.reeusda.gov/1700/funding/ourfund.htm. For questions, contact: Elizabeth Tuckermanty, Program Director, Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program, 202/205-0241, etuckermanty@csrees.usda.gov. Applicants must register their organization with www.grants.gov prior to applying.

USDA DEVELOPING FOOD STAMP OUTREACH COALITION

It is estimated that more than \$5 billion could have been given to America's low-income people in 2001 if food stamps reached all Americans eligible to receive them. This likely exceeds the yearly amount of food given out by every food bank and pantry in America combined.

The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), with its state and local partners and others, is working to address this gap by doing outreach for food stamps. Nearly 40 percent of people who are eligible for food stamps do not apply for them. In most cases, this is not because these people are not interested, or because they have never heard of the program. It is because they think they are not eligible, or they do not know how or where to apply.

FNS is now founding a coalition to work with anti-hunger groups around the country on food stamp outreach. Hundreds of organizations across America, from food banks to legal service centers, to religious groups, fight hunger by helping low-income people access food stamps. If you are interested in helping with this effort, FNS wants to hear from you. FNS is building this national network to help empower anti-hunger groups to do more food stamp outreach, and to assist them in building a collaboration. In addition, FNS intends to work with state and local food stamp offices to improve access to food stamps.

Groups with past experience in food stamp outreach and newcomers are both welcome. FNS can provide free resources and advice on how to increase awareness of the food stamp program in your community, such as free flyers at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/info.htm.

For more information contact David Heller, FNS food stamp outreach specialist, at 703/305-2391 or via e-mail david.heller@fns.usda.gov.

CHILD NUTRITION ARCHIVES ESTABLISHED

Child Nutrition Programs create an important safety net which helps to ensure that children have access to nutritious meals. In recognition of the importance of these programs, the National Food Service Management Institute at the University of Mississippi recently established the country's only historical archive dedicated to child nutrition programs. With funding from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the Child Nutrition Archives opened in November 2003.

The primary goal of the archives is to document federal child nutrition programs – Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, After-School Snack and the National School Lunch Program. The program also hopes to collect documents that predate the establishment of federal child nutrition programs.

"We'd love to have materials from programs in the early 1900's" said Beth King, Acting Director of Technology Transfer. "Those programs provided vision for the current federal program."

Currently, the collection includes correspondence, photographs and official papers from child nutrition advocates, including Thelma G. Flanagan, who began spearheading lunch programs in Florida schools in the 1930's. Anyone who has been involved with child nutrition is encouraged to contact the archive about donating materials. Those with personal stories about child nutrition programs can arrange for the stories to be recorded.

"Whether they be state directors, program coordinators or child nutrition workers in the schools, anyone who has worked in or benefited from a child nutrition program and wants to participate should contact us," King said.

To donate materials to the NFSMI Child Nutrition Archives, contact Johnston at 800/321-3054 or mwjohnst@olemiss.edu.

RESEARCH NOTES

A collaborative study conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and Harvard University scientists showed decreased nutritional dietary quality and increased caloric intake among U.S. children on days when they consumed fast food. The study, which appears in the January issue of the journal *Pediatrics*, confirms other similar, previously published studies.

The authors analyzed existing dietary intake data from 6,212 children and adolescents, aged four to 19, from a nationally representative USDA Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals, 1994-1996, and the Supplemental Children's Survey, 1998. The survey data are collected on two non-consecutive days by ARS, USDA's chief scientific research agency.

Children who ate fast food, compared with those who did not, consumed more total calories, more calories per gram of food, more total and saturated fat, more total carbohydrate, more added sugars and more sugar-sweetened beverages, but less milk, fiber, fruit and nonstarchy vegetables. The study also revealed that, out of the two days surveyed, those that consumed fast food on only one day experienced nutrient shortfalls on the day they had fast food. But they did not experience shortfalls the other day.

Experts estimate that childhood consumption of fast foods increased fivefold, from two percent of daily meals in the late 1970's, to 10 percent by the mid-1990's. During that time, the number of fast food restaurants more than doubled to an estimated 250,000 nationwide.

The findings are important because childhood obesity is increasing in prevalence. Inadequate consumption of fruits and vegetables has been associated with obesity-related problems such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Fruits and nonstarchy vegetables may protect against excessive weight gain because of their low energy density and high fiber content.

TEXAS REGISTER

Texas Department of Human Services (DHS), 01/23/04, p. 640. DHS adopts an amendment to §12.2,1 without changes to the proposed text, published in the 12/05/03 issue of the *Texas Register*. Justification for the amendment is to remove the specific dollar amount of the threshold for the single audit requirements and to provide the reference for compliance to 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 3052. This amendment makes the rule consistent with corresponding audit rules in Chapter 12. DHS received no comments regarding adoption of the amendment. The amendment is adopted under the Human Resources Code, Chapters 22 and 33, which authorizes DHS to administer public and nutritional assistance programs. The amendment implements the Human Resources Code, §§22.0001-22.040 and §§33.001-33.027. DHS hereby certifies that the adoption has been reviewed by legal counsel and found to be a valid exercise of the agency's legal authority. Filed with the Office of the Secretary of State on 01/08/04. The effective date is 01/28/04. For further information, call 512/438-3734.

FEDERAL REGISTER

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 01/27/04, p. 3874. USDA solicits comments related to methods for improving access to the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) by children in needy areas. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has partnered with national service organizations to promote the SFSP, utilized regional and local community groups to identify unique demographic needs and participation barriers, met with potential sponsoring organizations and community leaders to identify potential solutions to common barriers and targeted specific unserved and underserved areas for SFSP expansion. In addition to these endeavors, state agencies have made significant efforts to promote and expand SFSP. Additionally, FNS has developed policies that encourage and expand access to SFSP by children in

needy areas. Allowing school sponsors to serve summer meals under an existing National School Lunch Program agreement has enabled seamless year-round participation. Other policies include authorizing eligibility determinations based on alternate means in lieu of applications, expanding approved meal service times, and waiving certain budget requirements. Collectively, changes to SFSP policies have enabled sponsors' participation in SFSP while considering unique circumstances. While modest success has been achieved in increasing participation by children, FNS continues to solicit comments and evaluate innovative suggestions related to improving access, especially in rural areas. In recent years, FNS has received and evaluated numerous suggestions, including: waiving application requirements for enrolled sites in needy areas, allowing off-site consumption of meals, establishing pilot programs to further evaluate innovative methods to improve access and even altering the congregate feeding design of the current program to accommodate home-based lunches. As a result of these and other suggestions, FNS has expanded access and lessened the management burden placed on SFSP sponsors. FNS solicits comments and suggestions related to access from all parties. FNS is particularly interested in suggestions from faith-based and community-based organizations, which might take advantage of existing service delivery methods and expand opportunities for program participation by such organizations. Comments must be postmarked by 03/29/04 to be considered. Comments should be addressed to Mr. Robert Eadie, Chief, Policy and Program Development Branch, Child Nutrition Division, Food and Nutrition Service, Department of Agriculture, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 634, Alexandria, Virginia 22302-1594. Comments will also be accepted via e-mail sent to cnproposal@fns.usda.gov. For further information, contact Keith Churchill or Marcus Hambrick at 703/305-2590.



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