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## SSI Beneficiaries Face Barriers to Securing CalFresh Benefits

In 1973, about 30% of SSI recipients received food stamps. Food advocates decided to cash out food stamps and give each SSI recipient \$10 in additional benefits in their SSI check to use to purchase food. This covered 100% of Californians getting SSI.

The \$10 allocation was never adjusted for inflation. Since 1995, food advocates have wanted to end the SSI cash-out, so that all SSI recipients would receive Food Stamps (CalFresh). The argument against this policy change was that the SSI cash-out would hurt maybe 5% of the SSI recipients children who would lose some food stamps.

The federal government refused to treat California SSI kids differently than all other SSI kids in America, thus - no cash-out even if it benefits 95% of the caseload.

For 25 years 95% of the SSI recipients were denied meaningful purchase power for food - at the urging and insistence of those not on SSI and not enduring hunger.

The 2018-19 Budget bill, AB 1811, ended the state's SSI cash-out policy. SSI/SSP recipients became eligible for CalFresh food assistance as of June 1, 2019.

The state projected that 369,000 households, out of 1.3 million SSI recipients, would sign up for CalFresh after gaining eligibility.

The AB 1811 created a state-funded food benefit for certain households whose current CalFresh benefits will be reduced or eliminated when SSI cash-out

ends. These households contain a mix of SSI/SSP recipients and other people with low incomes who 1) were not enrolled in SSI/SSP and 2) received CalFresh benefits. Based on the CalFresh benefits calculations, once SSI/SSP recipients become eligible for CalFresh about 80,000 of these mixed households would see reduced CalFresh assistance or lose eligibility for CalFresh, according to state projections.

The state budget provided \$230 million to end the SSI-cash out. Of this amount, \$199.3 million paid for the new state-funded food benefit for the 80,000 cases.

The remainder will support automation changes (such as reprogramming computer systems) and counties' additional costs for administering the CalFresh program. The budget package authorized the Department of Finance (DOF) to transfer additional funds, as needed, to pay for other costs associated with ending the SSI cash-out.

The law provided that folks could apply in May with CalFresh eligibility starting in June. The county operated SAWS system shows that while in April there were 58,833 applications, in May there were 108,242 applications. There are no numbers of how many households actually received food assistance. As stated above, the Department of Social Services (DSS) also estimated that out of 1.3 million SSI recipients about 369,000 will receive benefits. That is equal to 30%, which what we had in 1972.

DSS set up workgroups, some open to the public, to plan for the implementation of the SSI Food Stamp Cash-Out. At these meetings it was agreed that folks can apply on-line, by phone or in-person. DSS agreed

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that the only verification needed for SSI recipients to obtain CalFresh benefits would be medical and shelter expenses for all practical purposes. If the SSI recipient/CalFresh applicant claimed medical expenses and housing costs, the county could request verification of the housing costs only if the housing costs were questionable.

Several applicants, in various counties, like San Diego, Sacramento, applying on-line, received a CFS 77 form requesting a list of verification below. The form wants the applicant to provide the verification that applies to non-SSI recipients applying for CalFresh for the first time. Most people would look at this form and dump it in the closest garbage can, saying "you've got to be kidding me."

The CFS 77 states "Please provide all of the items below that apply to you and your household."

- *Non-Citizen Sponsor's Statements*
- *Proof of Income such as:*
- *Pay Stubs or other proof of earnings*
- *Social Security and Veteran Benefit Award Letters*
- *School Grants/Loan Statements*
- *Child Support papers showing awards by the courts*
- *Unemployment printouts/stubs*
- *Disability/Workman's Compensation award letter/stubs*
- *Statements of any other income*
- *Rent and Utility bills showing the address and person billed for the rent and/or utilities*
- *Property Tax Statements*
- *Real Estate, Mortgage, and Personal Property Loan Statements*
- *Cost of medical bills or receipts*
- *Cost of medical transportation*
- *Child Care Receipts*
- *Proof of Court Ordered Child Support you pay*
- *Statement of school expense for household members*
- *Personal Property and/or resource documents such as:*
- *Vehicle Registrations and Payment Books*
- *Checking Account Statements*
- *Savings Account Statements or Bank Records*
- *Insurance Policies*
- *Property Trust Deeds*
- *Mortgage Bills*
- *Verification documents such as:*
- *Identification for anyone over the age of 18 who lives in the home*
- *Social Security Cards*
- *Documentation of Naturalized Citizenship Status/ Non-Citizen Status*

- *Proof you applied for Disability Benefits or Unemployment Benefits*
- *School or Training Enrollment/Attendance Documentation*
- *Registration for Work with Employment Development Department (EDD)*
- *Doctor's Statement*
- *Verification about settlements such as Lawsuits and Insurance Claims*
- *Immunization Verification for all children ages six years and younger*
- *Birth Verification*
- *Proof of Pregnancy*
- *Marriage/Divorce Documents*
- *Health Insurance policies and premiums paid*
- *Conservator, Guardianship, Power of Attorney papers"*

However, verification is not the only problem. One person applied on-line and then got a packet of 35 pages, demanding that SSI recipients complete the forms and return it to the county, even though the on-line application was signed electronically.

Many counties denied the application because the SSI recipient applied in May and were told to reapply in June, even though DSS issued policy guidance to counties that they must take the applications filed in May and process them effective June 1, 2019.

For example, Ms. BL27433, an SSI recipient, applied for CalFresh during the month of May 2019. On May 23, 2019 Ms. BL27433 received a NOA stating: "Your household's application for CalFresh has been denied. Here's why: You or a member of your household are a recipient of Supplemental Security Income/State Supplemental Program (SSI/SSP) benefits and are not eligible to receive CalFresh benefits in California under existing law." Does this mean that on June 1, 2019 any household that had an SSI member became ineligible for CalFresh? It sure reads that way.

A similar letter was received by Ms. 1B93387 who applied on-line and completed a telephone interview in June only to get a notice of action dated 06/03/19 stating that "Your household's application for CalFresh has been denied. Here's why: You or a member of your household are a recipient of Supplemental Security Income/State Supplemental Program (SSI/SSP) benefits and are not eligible to receive CalFresh benefits in California under existing law."

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Some applicants did a telephone interview and then get a notice of action denying the application because they allegedly did not complete the interview.

The State Legislature and the Governor's office showered the counties with millions of dollars to program their computers to avoid these kinds of idiotic denials of food stamp benefits to SSI recipients See Table # 1.

## TABLE # 1

CalFresh SSI Eligibility Expansion Expenditures	2018-2019	2019-2020	TOTAL
In Millions			
CalFresh SSI Expansion County Administration	\$ 44.7	\$ 84.4	\$ 129.1
CalFresh SSI Expansion County Automation	\$ 11	\$ 1.8	\$ 12.8

Yet after giving counties \$12.8 million, the computers are still programmed to deny June CalFresh benefits for applicants with SSI incomes.

Automation is an integral part of the implementation of the CalFresh SSI expansion. Yet what have the millions of dollars given to counties produced?

-Applications unlawfully being denied because the computer still thinks that SSI beneficiaries are not eligible for CalFresh, even after June 1, 2019.

-Applicants being asked for all sorts of verifications, even verifications which were eliminated as CalFresh requirements several years ago.

The SSI expansion is being done in the 21st century with the policies and practices, including technology, of the 20th century. When will California enter the 21st century?

**ANOTHER VIEW** - On June 6, 2019, **Charles Bean, the Executive Director of the California IHSS Consumer Alliance** stated "I would ask: "For what amount, \$10 a month, this much work is not worth it!" or "You do not already have this information for the Medi-Cal or SSI/SSP I am already receiving?"

to apply; of course if some one does it for them, that is different.

What happened to the use of technology and reduction in paper?

Technology is tapping into other programs like Medi-Cal and verifying what is on file. Reduction in paper is less space used between lines and electronic signatures at office. By the way, reduce the number of times they send out our civil rights (in every language); I know there was a lawsuit that required this, but it is differently something that can be re-looked at and lessen the work Social Workers have to do (Have you ever signed up for Medi-Cal or CalFresh? They have you listen to a video tell you of your rights and then every time they send an action they re-send it).

Anyway, thank you for the information. Thank the workers at the different Food Banks (and other sites) who take the time to assist individuals -their assistance make



**Marko Mijic, 32, of Sacramento**, has been appointed deputy secretary of program and fiscal affairs at the California Health and Human Services Agency, where he has served in several positions including as acting deputy secretary of

program and fiscal affairs since 2018 and assistant secretary of program and fiscal affairs from 2015 to 2018. Mijic held several position at the American Heart Association, including manager of licensing and new ventures from 2014 to 2015 and manager of government relations from 2013 to 2014. He held several positions at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, including special assistant from 2011 to 2013 and senior staff assistant from 2009 to 2011. Mijic earned a Master of Public Policy degree from the American University School of Public Affairs. This position requires Senate confirmation and the compensation is \$170,004. Mijic is a Democrat.