



TERRA LAWSON-REMER
SUPERVISOR, THIRD DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
2021 MAR 25 AM 11:14
CLERK OF THE BOARD
OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: April 6, 2021

10

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT:

INCREASING ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT IN COUNTY SELF- SUFFICIENCY PROGRAMS TO SERVE EVERY COMMUNITY MEMBER IN NEED WITHOUT BARRIERS TO ENTRY (DISTRICT: 3)

OVERVIEW

The pandemic-induced recession pushed San Diegans to use their savings, rely on food banks, and seek economic support from our County's self-sufficiency programs. CalFresh, CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants, and General Relief are five of San Diego County's self-sufficiency programs that support families during difficult economic times. While enrollment in these self-sufficiency programs is at an all-time high, barriers such as generational stigma, underfunded outreach efforts, racial biases, and misperceptions regarding guidance from the previous federal administration may limit optimal enrollment in these programs – especially at a time when families need this support the most.

There is a need to further understand the root causes of under-enrollment and develop a new strategy to target all eligible San Diego County residents given the impacts of the pandemic on the most vulnerable. It is concerning that so many individuals are not accessing the very programs designed to alleviate such problems given the sheer number of San Diego County residents who experience food insecurity, lack access to proper healthcare, and are underemployed or unemployed.

San Diego County is currently far behind in enrolling eligible individuals in its self-sufficiency programs. In 2010, the Rose Institute at Claremont McKenna College found that among the twelve largest counties in California, San Diego County was significantly behind in CalFresh, CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal enrollment. In 2013, San Diego County ranked 44th out of 58 California counties in CalFresh enrollment. In 2015, San Diego County only had a 50.9 percent CalFresh enrollment rate.

The County has an obligation to ensure that accessing CalFresh, CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, CAPI, and General Relief sufficiency programs is easy and consumer-friendly for every County resident

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who is eligible. It has been more than a decade since the County thoroughly reviewed this issue. In 2010, the Board of Supervisors sent a memo to the Chief Administrative Officer requesting that the Social Services Advisory Board (SSAB) address the efficiency and effectiveness of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), now known as CalFresh. The SSAB established a time-limited working group comprised of community-based organizations that had experience working with SNAP to provide recommendations for simplifying the eligibility process and removing perceived barriers that impede program participation.

11 years later, it is clear that the County must once again analyze, understand, recommend, and shift our program priorities to ensure every San Diegan in need obtains any benefits for which they may be eligible. The pandemic has highlighted how important it is that we make sure County benefits work for every San Diegan, regardless of their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation.

I recommend that the Chief Administrative Officer convene a new stakeholder group under the SSAB that is dedicated to addressing the efficiency and effectiveness of the County's CalFresh, CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, CAPI, and General Relief enrollment programs.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)
SUPERVISOR TERRA LAWSON-REMER**

1. Request that the Chair of the Board of Supervisors send, on behalf of the Board, a letter requesting that the Social Services Advisory Board (SSAB) take the following actions:
 - a. Establish a temporary ad hoc subcommittee called the 'Outreach, Accessibility, and Enrollment Task Force' (Task Force) comprised solely of less than a quorum of the SSAB's members.
 - b. Request the Task Force to undertake a comprehensive review of enrollment barriers and plans to overcome these barriers for CalFresh, CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants, and General Relief in an effort to increase outreach, accessibility, and enrollment for qualifying individuals in San Diego County.
 - c. Request that the Task Force obtain the input of local experts and advocates with knowledge of health and human services in outreach, analyzing, and increasing enrollment in self-sufficiency programs in California.
 - d. Request that the SSAB provide a monthly status report to the Board describing the Task Force's progress.
 - e. Request that the SSAB report the Task Force's initial findings to the Board, along with any interim recommendations no later than October 4, 2021, and to provide a final report and recommendations no later than December 7, 2021.
2. Authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, to procure an agreement in accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, and upon successful negotiations and a determination of a fair and reasonable price, enter into an agreement for a comprehensive assessment of the County's outreach, enrollment, and

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accessibility for the CalFresh, CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants, and General Relief programs, examining issues including, but not limited to, application requirements and processes, state and federal regulations, language barriers, technology barriers, customer-centered culture, case management, outreach strategies and tactics, community partner opportunities and staffing levels of eligibility workers, and to provide the Task Force support, as requested.

3. Direct the CAO to return to the Board with consultant-provided initial recommendations no later than October 4, 2021, and final recommendations no later than December 7, 2021.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year 2020 – 2021 operational plan.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Food insecurity and hunger have serious adverse effects on both children and adults. Hunger due to food insufficiency is associated decreased school readiness and success including lower grades, higher rates of absenteeism, repeating a grade, and an inability to focus in the classroom (Kleinman et al. 2002). Research has also shown that food hardship and hunger, even while controlling for other indicators of poverty, is also generally associated with behavioral problems in children. For adults, food insecurity is associated with an elevated risk of developing a myriad of health issues such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and other chronic illnesses (*Hunger in America*, 2014).

CalFresh provides financial assistance to those who need to purchase food, reducing food insecurity and hunger within our communities. Currently, 332,597 individuals are enrolled in the program. CalFresh recipients must be San Diego County residents, have a Social Security number, and have a total household gross monthly income that is less than or equal to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Based on their income and household information, beneficiaries receive a monthly allotment in the form of an EBT card to cover basic food expenses.

CalWORKs is designed to help our community members transition from social welfare to attaining work opportunities by providing temporary cash assistance to eligible families with minor children. 37,458 individuals rely on CalWORKs. This program is integral to help families attain self-sufficiency, while still providing a social safety net. This program is income-sensitive as it factors other assistance such as unemployment.

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Medi-Cal is California's Medicaid health care program. Over 464,000 San Diegans rely on this program for a variety of medical services. Children and adults with limited income and resources rely upon this program for primary care, dental care and behavioral health services. This program is critical to increasing access to health care among our most vulnerable community members.

Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI) is a state-funded cash aid program for certain immigrants who are not eligible for the federally funded Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Program (SSI/SSP). CAPI is an essential safety net program for immigrant community members who are not able to access many other welfare programs. To be eligible, applicants must be either aged 65 or older, blind, or disabled and not eligible for SSI/SSP solely due to their immigration status. Based on participants' immigration, marital, and disability status, CAPI provides a monthly payment to help cover living expenses.

General Relief provides temporary cash assistance for eligible county residents who have no other means of support. 2,347 individuals currently use this program. Applicants must be a San Diego County resident for at least 15 days, intend to remain in San Diego County, be a U.S. Citizens, or Legal Permanent Resident with income less than \$449 (for a single person) or \$614 (for a married couple).

San Diego County is currently far behind in enrolling eligible individuals in its self-sufficiency programs. In 2010, the Rose Institute at Claremont McKenna College found that among the twelve largest counties in California, San Diego County was significantly behind in CalFresh, CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal enrollment. In 2013, San Diego County ranked 44th out of 58 California counties in CalFresh enrollment. In 2015, San Diego County improved its rank by two places as it ranked 42nd out of the 58 counties with a 50.9 percent CalFresh enrollment rate.

Under-enrollment of immigrants in self-sufficiency programs may be due to fear of repercussions from proposed changes to the "Public Charge" rule. The change, which was in effect between 2019-2021, expanded the criteria through which immigrants may be denied U.S. admission/residency for having received public benefits or being deemed likely to receive public benefits in the future. A report by The Urban Institute found that 17.7 percent of adult immigrants in California avoided public benefits for fear of risking future green card status.

The San Diego Hunger Coalition estimates that as of November 2020, nearly 1 in 3 San Diegans (31 percent) are experiencing nutrition insecurity, up 25 percent from pre-pandemic levels. A nutrition insecure household struggles to provide enough healthy food for everyone under the roof, risking hunger and malnutrition. As of November, this nutrition insecurity extends to an estimated 603,882 adults (29 percent), 146,026 seniors (30 percent), and 284,459 children (40 percent). Not knowing where one's next meal will come from has several adverse effects on the physical, emotional, and educational wellbeing of children, according to many studies. The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion's Health and Academic Achievement report states that hunger due to insufficient food intake is associated with lower grades, higher rates of absenteeism, repeating a grade, and an inability to focus among students. Professor Kristen S. Slack (et al. 2005) found that food hardship and hunger, even while

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controlling for other indicators of poverty, is also generally associated with behavioral problems in children.

The negative effects of hunger and food insecurity are not limited to children, but also extend to adults as well. Food insecure adults have an increased risk of developing diabetes, are associated with a variety of chronic illnesses, and may experience higher levels of aggression and anxiety. In addition, a 2014 report by Feeding America and Oxfam titled “From Paycheck to Pantry: Hunger in Working America” found that among the working-class households served by Feeding America, 28 percent reported having at least one member with diabetes and 50 percent having at least one member with high blood pressure. Both numbers are higher than the national percentages of people who suffer from such conditions, suggesting that working-class households have a higher incidence of these health problems. This relation between food insecurity and poor health is especially concerning given San Diego County’s under-enrollment in both CalFresh and Medi-Cal.

Many families who are experiencing food insecurity also report having to make financial trade-offs, such as deciding whether to purchase food or pay for necessary health treatments. Over 69 percent of Feeding America working-class households reported choosing between paying for food and medicine or medical care in the past year. This could be alleviated if households had proper access to programs that provide financial assistance to cover both food and health expenses.

Health outcomes also have a unique relationship with employment and job retention. According to a 2018 Kaiser Family Foundation report, poor health was found to be associated with increased risk of job loss, while access to affordable health insurance has a positive effect on individuals’ ability to obtain and maintain employment. Unemployment was also found to have a strong association with poor health outcomes. These findings indicate a principle that user-friendly access to healthcare is an integral part of maximizing self-sufficiency among San Diego County residents.

The SSAB established a time-limited working group in 2010 comprised of community-based organizations that had experience working with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to provide recommendations for simplifying the eligibility process and removing perceived barriers that impede program participation. The recommendations were compiled in a report titled “Recommendations for Improving the San Diego County Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program” and was received by the Board of Supervisors in December 2010.

While the Board of Supervisors cited a 60 percent increase in SNAP participation due to some of the recommendations outlined by the working group, San Diego County still has some of the lowest enrollment rates among California counties. There is a need to further understand the root causes of our under enrollment and develop a new strategy to target all eligible San Diego County residents to be able to enroll and access CalFresh, CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal benefits.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

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Today's proposed request supports the Building Better Health Initiative of the County of San Diego's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan. Creating a stakeholder table to address the issues within our CalFresh, CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal enrollment program and increasing access to such programs achieves the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan's mission of promoting the implementation of a service delivery system that is sensitive to individuals' needs.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Terra Lawson-Remer', is positioned above the printed name.

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A

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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

REQUIRES FOUR VOTES: ☐ Yes ☒ No

WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED

☐ Yes ☒ No

PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:

N/A

BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:

N/A

BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:

N/A

MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:

N/A

ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):

N/A

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer, District 3

OTHER CONCURRENCE(S): N/A

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