

SB 521: TRAINING TO WORK ACT OF 2015
SENATOR CAROL LIU, 25TH SENATE DISTRICT
Introduced February 27, 2015

THE PROBLEM

Over 4 million Californians receive food assistance, or CalFresh, with the majority of recipients either unemployed or underemployed. According to the California Employment Development Department's Labor Market Information Division in January 2015 there were over 1.3 million unemployed individuals in California. The CalFresh Employment and Training (CalFresh E&T) Program is intended to improve employment skills and work opportunities, reducing reliance on CalFresh benefits in the future. However, this program has gone underutilized, leaving dollar-for-dollar federal funds intended for employment training unspent while CalFresh recipients remain unemployed and underemployed.

BACKGROUND

In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2013, California received over \$6 Million in federal funds for its CalFresh E&T Program. Many counties also chose to draw down additional federal funds through the E&T 50 percent match of allowable expenditures. In total, California's E&T program received \$92,050,126 in FFY 2013. While this number seems large, it is only a very small fraction of what is necessary to offer E&T slots to everyone in the program. Underutilization is disproportionately harming low-income, women-lead, minority families who account for about 70% of CalFresh households. More employment training and work opportunities can be extended to low-income Californians by clarifying the rules and aligning eligibility with those of other programs.

There are many available state matching sources that offer a dollar-for-dollar match in funds to better serve our CalFresh E&T participants, specifically within the Community College districts and Community Re-entry Councils. These matching sources could provide valuable training opportunities as over two-thirds of CalFresh head

of households have completed at least 12 years of education, are ready for community college, and potentially eligible to receive financial aid. CalFresh E&T federal matching funds are uncapped and could allow for thousands more eligible individuals to participate in the CalFresh E&T program.

With new Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) guidelines and services being implemented currently, it is essential to the success of low-income families that the two programs be linked and coordinated. WIOA agencies and CalFresh E&T programs are already crossing services, but without knowledge or coordination from the leaders of either program. This means that resources are not being utilized to their full extent to best serve the unemployed.

SOLUTION

SB 521 will get Californians back to work by doing to following;

- Increase collaboration and leverage funds between the CalFresh E&T program, the community colleges, and WIOA agencies;
- Increase participants' career retention through extending CalFresh E&T supportive services from 90 days to 5 months;
- Ensure eligible participants are no longer denied access to the CalFresh E&T program due to unclear and inconsistent program guidance

SUPPORT

Western Center on Law and Poverty (Co-Sponsor)
Women's Policy Institute (Co-Sponsor)

OPPOSITION

None on file