

June 22, 2006

Senator Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senate  
331 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein:

The California Association of Food Banks and its undersigned colleagues are writing to urge you to work to secure funding to expand the extraordinarily effective Simplified Summer Food Program—also known as the Lugar Pilots—currently available in 26 states, so that it can reach all states and the District of Columbia. The Simplified Summer Food Program, where available, is very effective in increasing participation in the Summer Food Service Program, the most underutilized child nutrition program.

During the school year, over 15 million children receive free or reduced-price school lunch, but fewer than 3 million children have access to those meals during the summer due to complicated paperwork and accounting requirements. These rules make operating the program difficult for any eligible school, local government agency, or private non-profit. Small faith-based organizations have an especially difficult time.

In California only 30% of the eligible children receiving a lunch during the school year have access to a lunch during the summer months.

Summer food is an important weapon in the battle against childhood hunger and obesity. The meals must meet nutritional guidelines similar to those required in the school breakfast and lunch programs. Studies have found that children who eat school breakfast and lunches have a healthier diet than those who do not. They drink more milk, eat more fruits and vegetables, and consume less saturated fat.

In addition, summer food is an important support for working families who are struggling to make ends meet. During the school year, low-income parents can rely on school meals to ensure that their children are getting a healthy breakfast and lunch. When those meals disappear during the summer, America's Second Harvest reports that the demand for emergency food by families with children increases dramatically; indeed, it produces a seasonal spike in need even larger than wintertime.

The nutritious food children receive is only part of the benefit. In addition to providing a safe haven for children, over 93 percent of summer food sites also include supplemental activities, such as parks and recreation department programs, library book clubs, summer educational enrichment, and other recreational and educational programming, fostering both learning and physical activity throughout the summer.

To increase participation, Congress created the simplified program as a pilot for 13 states and Puerto Rico through the FY 2001 Consolidated Appropriations Act. The states chosen were those with the lowest participation. The 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act made the pilot permanent and added the next six worst performing states. The 2006 Agriculture Appropriations bill expanded it to seven more low performing states.

The Simplified Summer Food Program has fulfilled Congress's intended goal to increase program participation. During the first three years, participation in the first 13 pilot states grew by 26 percent while in the rest of the country it slipped by 18 percent. Low-income children in the other states are missing out on nutritious meals that their bodies need and on the programs that keep them safe and out of trouble. Also, states not included in the pilot are missing out on federal entitlement dollars just because of red tape that does not improve program integrity.

Currently twenty-four states—Alabama, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia—and the District of Columbia are not included in the program.

The Simplified Summer Food Program is important because it eliminates complicated accounting requirements, significantly cutting unnecessary paperwork and decreasing administrative costs; and it allows sponsors to receive the full federal reimbursement, making it easier to operate the program without losing money.

Please help ensure that hungry children in California and across the country have access to the meals they need during the summer by supporting funding for expansion of the Simplified Summer Food Program.

Sincerely,

Terry Garner

Project Director

California Association of Food Banks

Along with the undersigned organizations:

Alameda County Community Food Bank  
California Food Policy Advocates  
California Hunger Action Coalition  
California Park and Recreation Society, representing  
California State University, Los Angeles, Student Nutrition Association  
Central Coast Hunger Coalition  
Children's Discovery Museum of North San Diego County  
City of Los Angeles  
Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco  
Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano  
Food Bank of Nevada County  
Food for People, Inc., Eureka  
FOOD Share, Inc, Ventura County Regional Food Bank  
Healthy School Food Coalition, Los Angeles  
Healthy Start of Humboldt County  
Humboldt County Boys and Girls Club  
Imperial Valley Food Bank, El Centro  
Inyo Mono Advocates for Community Action, Inc.  
L.A. Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness  
Los Angeles Regional Foodbank  
Merced County Community Action Agency WIC Program  
Prevention Institute, Oakland  
RESULTS - Alhambra Chapter  
Redwood Empire Food Bank  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County

San Diego Hunger Coalition  
Senior Gleaners, Inc., Sacramento  
St. Rita's School 6 to 6 Program  
State of California Department of Education  
The Food Bank for Monterey County  
The Strategic Alliance for Health Food and Activity Environments (representing  
obesity-prevention organizations)      fourteen      CA

United Way of Imperial County