



SPUR

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May 12, 2017

Assembly Member Lorena S. Gonzalez Fletcher
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, California 95814
Via fax: 916-319-2181

Assembly Bill 164 (Arambula) - Support

Dear Assembly Member Gonzalez Fletcher:

On behalf of SPUR, I am writing in support of Assembly Bill 164, which would increase the flexibility of the state's Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system and improve our food assistance safety net. Currently, the EBT system delivers CalFresh benefits (formerly known as food stamps) to millions of Californians who rely on that assistance to meet their basic food needs. While the system is very effective at delivering this service, it is not currently structured to allow California to deliver additional benefits when emergencies arise, changes in federal policy run counter to the state's preferred policy direction, or when California wants to deliver new nutrition benefits through the EBT card.

One specific area where this bill would be helpful is giving the state the flexibility to supplement the CalFresh program with a healthy food incentive if it chose to do so in the future. SPUR is currently piloting such a program, called Double Up Food Bucks, in Santa Clara County in an effort to make healthy food more affordable for low-income residents. Our experience with this pilot has underscored how a program like Double Up Food Bucks could scale and support the health of more families if it was integrated into the EBT system. This bill would provide a clear pathway within the EBT system for the state to explore a healthy food incentives program as a supplement to CalFresh.

As we've highlighted in our report, *Healthy Food Within Reach*, one of the biggest barriers to healthy eating among Californians is the affordability of healthy food. The current EBT system helps address that barrier, perhaps more than any other policy tool at the state's disposal. Making the EBT system more flexible, as outlined in this legislation, would make this tool even more valuable for California as it seeks to improve public health and nutrition. For that reason we respectfully request your AYE vote for Assembly Bill 164.

Sincerely,

Eli Zigas
Food and Agriculture Policy Director