

Nancy Swanson
Director
Department of Transitional Assistance
San Bernardino County Human Services System

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee. I am Nancy Swanson, Director of the Transitional Assistance Department for San Bernardino County. The Transitional Assistance Department administers Public Assistance programs, including the Food Stamp Program, for the residents of San Bernardino County.

Today I would like to share some important information on San Bernardino County's continued efforts to increase public awareness and participation in the Food Stamp program.

I'll be providing statistical data on San Bernardino County's Food Stamp caseload, including recent growth and possible contributing factors, how we've worked with many agencies to assist the public with accessing the Food Stamp program, different constraints the county faces, and what counties need to increase the Food Stamp participation rate.

Last year (2009) San Bernardino County received 152,624 Food Stamp applications, which is an average of 12,719 applications per month. Currently we have 105,044 active Food Stamp cases with a total of 274,468 individuals participating. Approximately 38.2 million dollars of benefits were issued per month.

From January 2009 to December 2009 the Food Stamp caseload increased 46.1% (The average monthly change for this period is 3.5%)

The Economy is clearly driving the demand for services. A changing applicant is also being noted.

- Two-parent family caseload increased by 67.5%
- County residents receiving public assistance increased from 1 in every 5 residents to 1 in every 4 residents
- Recession has forced many working families to apply for government help who have never done so before

Online Application- "C4Yourself"

One avenue used to increase public awareness and program access was to create an on-line application. This allows customers the flexibility to apply at anytime. In August 2007, in conjunction with the County's Consortia, C4Yourself was launched. Since inception, we have received over 17,000 Food Stamp applications through www.c4yourself.com.

Outreach

San Bernardino County continues to reach out to provide important information on Food Stamps and eligibility requirements to community and faith based organizations, the public, family agencies, and other County departments. We participate in many different outreach efforts including Inland Empire Economic Recovery Corporation Home Foreclosure Prevention Seminars, job fairs, senior events, and health events. Our participants receive literature on the Food Stamp Program, including general eligibility requirements, as well as nutritious food choices, how to choose an active lifestyle, and recipe cards to create healthy meals.

We recognize our county's geographic area is large and customers living below the federal poverty level reside in all areas. To assist with program accessibility we continue to collaborate with many community-based organizations. To assist our customers living in the remote mountain areas we recently relocated eligibility staff to an outstation office in Big Bear. In addition we have eligibility staff located on-site at schools to accept program applications and provide customer service.

Last year training was provided to 224 participants from community based organizations, county departments, and schools. This training covered general program and eligibility requirements, the C4Yourself website and how to access the on-line application. Participants were given user guides to assist them in helping members of the community.

Many families/individuals do not apply for Food Stamp benefits due to the social stigma associated with receiving assistance from the government. The public has a perception benefits are too small to make a difference and the program is not easily accessible.

A recent survey completed by the USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) indicates the most common reasons why a person does not apply for Food Stamps is perceiving oneself to be ineligible, avoiding dependence on government assistance, and difficulty of applying for benefits.

Changes to the process to make applying for the program less intrusive and simplification of requirements would help to overcome some of these perceived barriers. We believe that our on-line application process, as well as our outreach efforts, is a step in the right direction in helping to reduce these barriers, as well as streamlining the application process.

With the increasing caseloads salary and benefits costs have increased dramatically. The average employee cost increased by 68% from FY 01/02 to 08/09. Program Administration funding has stayed relatively flat for the same period. As a result, staffing levels have dropped significantly

Additional funding is needed to serve our increasing caseloads and assist the families within our communities.

It is important that we continue to collaborate with our state and federal partners to ensure adequate funding – not only for the administration of the program but also to educate the public and reach out to those that may qualify.

The Transitional Assistance Department is committed to increasing public awareness, accessibility and participation in the Food Stamp program. Working collaboratively with government and community partners, this goal is achievable.