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333 W. SANTA ANA BLVD. • SANTA ANA, CA 92701 • WWW.OCGOV.COM

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Contact: Carrie Braun  
(714) 834-7218  
carrie.braun@ocgov.com

### **Supervisors Approve Restaurant Meals Program**

The Orange County Board of Supervisors has authorized a program to allow those who are elderly, disabled and homeless who participate in the state's food-assistance program to purchase prepared meals at participating restaurants.

Upon implementation, Orange County will join Alameda, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties in offering the Restaurant Meals Program, which allows participants to purchase prepared meals with their CalFresh benefits.

CalFresh is the State-administered, federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) formerly known as Food Stamps.

"The Restaurant Meals Program increases the availability of cooked meals for those who don't have a place to store food or a place to cook it," said Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Lisa Bartlett, Fifth District. "Our emphasis will be on encouraging healthy meals and a greater availability of prepared meals."

"There is no reason why people should go hungry in Orange County when food is available," Vice Chair Michelle Steel, Second District, said.

An average of 264,000 Orange County residents per month received CalFresh benefits during the past fiscal year, of whom 54% were children. Of all CalFresh recipients, about 19,000 may be eligible for the Restaurant Meals Program, according to the Social Services Agency (SSA).

Supervisor Todd Spitzer, Third District, said to truly address homelessness, we must first and foremost deal with basic human needs like shelter, and basic nutrition. "No one can focus on mental health or job training when they are hungry," said Supervisor Spitzer. "Offering nutrition options is a critical step in the right direction."

Supervisor Shawn Nelson, Fourth District, said the program will be evaluated by the Board as it progresses. "As with any state program, it will be up to us to assure that the goals of the program are being met and that the population most in need is appropriately benefitting," he said.

Board approval of the program allows SSA to submit a proposed implementation plan to the California Department of Social Services. SSA must return to the Board for approval of a

Master Agreement between the County and participating restaurants, which must complete an application, enter into a formal agreement and maintain insurance. SSA would then begin certifying eligible CalFresh recipients and advertising the program.

Because of the extensive participation requirements, the program is not expected to be operational for the first phase until summer 2017. The County's cost for start-up of the program is estimated at \$160,000 with \$250,000 in annual staffing costs.

The proposed implementation plan includes an analysis of eligible recipients by zip code, as well as collaborating with the Health Care Agency, community groups, and restaurants to encourage participation and emphasize healthy eating options.

Restaurants must be located in Orange County, provide low-cost meals during regular business hours to CalFresh recipients, prohibit gratuities and sales tax, and maintain client confidentiality.

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