



Dear Orange County Board of Supervisors,

We write this letter to urge the Orange County Board of Supervisors to request the Orange County Social Services Agency to implement the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) for the most vulnerable local residents. Currently, those that receive food assistance in the form of CalFresh benefits cannot utilize funds to purchase prepared food, such as broiled chicken from supermarkets. The federal government recognized that that this rule limits access to food for vulnerable beneficiaries who are unable to prepare their own food, and consequently, created the RMP. This optional program allows counties to address the special needs of groups that are most likely to have difficulty preparing uncooked food. Orange County should implement RMP to allow CalFresh enrollees to dine in voluntarily participating restaurants when they are homeless, elderly, or disabled.

Advocates have long asked the Board of Supervisors to take this small step. The costs to the county are negligible, whereas steps to alleviate hunger benefit all of society. The RMP will not eliminate hunger and poverty in a county where 13 percent of adults and 24 percent of children are food insecure—in large part because CalFresh benefits are too meager to last through the month. However, implementing RMP will make a significant difference for people who, because they are unable to store or prepare food, experience additional risks for hunger.

People with disabilities or people who are elderly may simply be incapable of preparing food. People experiencing homelessness experience serious health risks due to their inability to safely store food. As Kim Sandoval, a homeless resident of the Santa Ana Civic Center, explained in a KPCC article, “It’s hard to keep fresh food clean and safe while living on the streets, with no refrigerator or way to keep bugs and animals out.”

Furthermore, for people who are homeless, the necessary act of storing and preparing food can have legal consequences. When people like Kim Sandoval prepare their food outdoors, they commit a misdemeanor and risk entering the criminal justice system. Citations will lead to incarceration or steep, recurrent, and escalating fines. Moreover, criminal records place people at risk of losing access to housing, employment, healthcare, and other assistance—making it harder for the homeless to escape homelessness.

OC Weekly published on January 5, 2011: “Orange County Homeless Advocates Urging Board of Supervisors to Allow Homeless to Use Food Stamps at Restaurants.” CalFresh beneficiaries who are homeless, elderly, or disabled have waited five long years for the Board of Supervisors to act.

A coalition of members representing American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, Civic Center Roundtable, Community Action Partnership of Orange County, Orange County Catholic Worker, and Orange County Food Access Coalition have organized this RMP Campaign. Private associations, religious institutions, community based organizations, public law centers, and grassroots organizers provide a broad, bipartisan base of support.

The RMP Campaign will continue to promote the fundamental right to food security until the Board of Supervisors takes action.

Sincerely,  
Undersigned RMP Coalition Partners and Organizations

*Attached: Signatories*