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**To:** County Welfare Directors Association of California

**From:** Tom Joseph, Director, CWDA Washington, D.C. Office

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**Re:** Federal Update

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**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**

The Senate adopted on Monday a five year reauthorization of the Farm Bill (S.954). The final vote was 66-27. The bill is the vehicle for policy changes to nutrition programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

**SNAP Cut Remains:** A number of SNAP amendments were offered, but most were either withdrawn or defeated. The Senate rejected, 76-20, an amendment by Senator Gillibrand (D-NY) to strike the \$4.1 billion SNAP cut from the legislation. The cut restricting the ability of states and counties to coordinate and streamline eligibility for SNAP with the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The legislation requires a LIHEAP benefit of at least \$10 annually. A number of states have elected the heat and eat option as a way of using the standard utility allowance to increase SNAP benefits. The cut is estimated to reduce benefits for about 500,000 households nationwide by about \$90 per month. Senators Feinstein and Boxer signed a letter opposing the cut, but only Senator Boxer voted to strike the cut on the floor. Funding would have been cut from crop insurance to pay to the SNAP restoration.

The Senate did reject, 58-40, an amendment to cut SNAP by about \$30 billion over ten years, with a large share of the savings from applying categorical eligibility for only those households receiving a cash benefit from CalWORKs or other public assistance. A similar provision is already in the House bill.

**SNAP/Felony Bar:** The Senate adopted by voice vote an amendment by Senator Vitter (R-LA) to place a lifetime ban on SNAP eligibility for convicted murderers, pedophiles, and rapists, even if the individuals have completed their sentences. The Amendment also requires SNAP applicants to certify in writing as to whether anyone in the household has been convicted of one of those crimes, imposing another administrative burden on the families and administering agency. A household with a person convicted of one of these crimes would be required to count that person's income and resources on their SNAP application but would not be allowed to count them when determining the SNAP allotment for the household.

Efforts were unsuccessful in modifying the amendment before final passage of the bill.

**House Action:** The House Agriculture Committee adopted its version of a farm bill (H.R. 1947) in mid-May. legislation is likely to contain a far deeper cut to SNAP. The House measure cuts SNAP by \$20 billion over ten years by restricting SNAP categorical eligibility and limiting LIHEAP heat and eat eligibility. House leadership have indicated that the House bill may reach the floor as early as next week.

### **Immigration Reform**

The Senate immigration bill (S. 744) is now being considered on the floor, with Senate leaders intending to complete action on it by the July 4th recess. The Judiciary Committee voted unanimously to adopt an amendment offered by Senator Franken (D-MN) and co-sponsored by Senator Feinstein (D-CA) to ensure that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has protocols in place to prevent children from being placed into the child welfare system simply because their parents are detained or deported, and to reunify parents and children who become involved in both immigration and child welfare proceedings. Specifically, the bill would allow parents to make calls at the time of apprehension to arrange for the care of their children; allow parents to participate in child welfare and family court proceedings affecting their children; and require ICE to consider the best interests of children in detention, release, and transfer decisions affecting their parents. Some of the bill's provisions were modified to reflect the administrative costs and realities of coordinating ICE and child welfare agencies, including contacting, *if appropriate*, a local consular office to identify, locate and contact a parent or an adult relative who may be eligible to care for the child instead of acting to terminate parental rights.

### **Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children**

**Senate Hearing on Child Sex Trafficking:** Earlier today, the Senate Finance Committee held a hearing entitled *Sex Trafficking and Exploitation in America: Child Welfare's Role in Prevention and Intervention*. Among the four witnesses was Michelle Guymon, Probation Director, Los Angeles County Probation Department and a member of the Innocence Lost LA Task Force. The hearing marked the first time that the issue was examined by the Committee. Senators from both parties were very engaged in the question and answer session and expressed a desire to learn more about the issue. The hearing lasted nearly two hours, which is long for the Senate.

CWDA is preparing a statement for the Senate Finance Committee hearing record.

**Senate CSEC Bill Introduced:** Last week, Senator Wyden (D-OR) introduced a bipartisan bill to begin to systematically identify the number of child trafficking victims. The measure would amend federal law to define all child victims of sex trafficking as a victim of child abuse and neglect instead of a criminal. It would also require state Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) plans to contain provisions and procedures to identify and assess child sex trafficking, and train child protective services workers to identify and provide services to victims. CWDA is reviewing the bill's provisions.