



U.S. House Agriculture Committee Subcommittee on Nutrition

Hearing:

The Past, Present and Future of SNAP: Innovation and Success in Employment and Training

Written Testimony:

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September 16, 2016

As SNAP is moving towards innovation and expansion of employment and training programs, coordination of public programs must be considered. CalFresh and CalWORKs are two safety net programs that provide subsidies to families in desperate need of assistance. Each program while housed within separate federal agencies, are administered by the same local agency. The two populations served by CalFresh and CalWORKs are very similar and often times the same.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is recently enacted legislation mandating a system of coordination for employment-based services that provides a framework for aligning training with needed skills and matches workers to employers. The CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work (WTW) program is designed to assist welfare recipients to prepare for and obtain employment, which may include barrier removal, vocational training, education, and other basic job skills training while CalFresh employment and training provides traditional employment services to non-welfare recipients, including Job Search, Job Club, Job Retention, and Basic Education. Although the shared goal of each program is self-sufficiency and long-term employment, there is incongruence among these employment based services that can interfere with overall program goals.

A client's path to self-sufficiency is not unidirectional; clients' needs may require that they move between programs while receiving services. By leveraging the strengths of each program, clients could benefit from continuity of services throughout their journey to self-reliance. The challenge lies in synchronizing the programs to maximize efficiency and accessibility.

WIOA seeks to address this issue by coordinating job training and educational resources between training providers and job seekers. Local Workforce Development Boards are responsible for assessing the area's job market and organizing resources to address employer's needs. The framework attempts to provide a seamless foundation through a one-stop service delivery system where clients can access career services, education, and vocational training to prepare for local in-demand jobs. While this structure sounds ideal, it only presents clients with an array of programs available, meaning the client still has to meet funding, time limits, and eligibility requirements for the program in which they can participate.

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CalWORKs and CalFresh each have an employment and training (E&T) component offering a variety of similar services but have different short-term goals and are operated very differently. Elements of funding, time limits and eligibility restrict which services are available to clients in the respective program. Additionally, funding levels differ for each program, with CalWORKs and WTW traditionally maintaining a much larger budget for employment training programs than CalFresh E&T.

As the client progresses through the employment programs, services are dictated by funding stream. CalWORKs clients transitioning off of cash aid may not be eligible for the same service in the CalFresh E&T program. While the same service may be offered in both programs, the service provider may differ. Additionally, when clients transition between programs, case management is disrupted. Fracturing the client's continuity in these types of services is ineffective and inefficient.

Additionally, employment services are tailored to program requirements rather than the client's employment needs, shifting focus away from the goal of self-sufficiency. Clients are subjected to changes in services as they move between one program and another. A client receiving CalWORKs benefits participating in WTW would be exited from the program once their employment income exceeded program limits, however they may still be eligible for CalFresh which would allow that client to participate in the CalFresh E&T program with different staff, programs, and resources. If at a later date the client became unemployed and reapplied for CalWORKs benefits, they would be exited from CalFresh E&T and required to participate in WTW; once again, with new staff, programs, and resources. The break in services contributes to an unprepared workforce and continued dependence on safety-net programs. In addition, outcomes and reporting are different for each program, leading to difficulty in tracking client participation and progress.

There are several ways to address these inconsistencies. Combining existing services and frameworks into an employment continuum that focuses on the client's path to self-sufficiency would allow for services to be provided seamlessly and with more fluidity. Clients would be able to participate in employment services regardless of program and funding source. Each program would have a proportionate level of funding that corresponded with the number of anticipated clients to ensure sufficient services and resources for all eligible families. Local governments would be responsible for administering funding and tracking progress. This would shift the driving factor from the program the client is in to the services the client needs to achieve self-sufficiency.