

To: Senator Mark Miller, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance
Representative Mark Pocan, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance
Members, Joint Committee on Finance

From: Hunger Task Force
Wisconsin Catholic Conference
Wisconsin Council of Churches
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families
Wisconsin Jewish Conference

Date: May 21, 2009

Re: FoodShare Benefits for Qualified Aliens (Budget Paper #443)—Support
Alternative 3

We are writing to urge you to reject the proposed elimination of the state option Food Share program (SOFSP) for legal, qualified immigrants in AB 75. This item was originally on the Joint Finance Committee's agenda for May 5, but it was held over and is now on the agenda for the week of May 22.

According to the Fiscal Bureau, there was an average of 825 people on state-only Food Share each month from July 2008 to January 2009, and the numbers are rising. In fact, this is a 94.6% increase from 2004-05, and the number of recipients is expected to rise further in the future.

Many advocates fought hard for the state option FoodShare program after the federal government cut eligibility for several categories of immigrants in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWOR). Subsequent federal legislation restored eligibility for federal food stamp benefits for the following individuals: (a) disabled qualified aliens; (b) qualified aliens who are under the age of 18; and (c) any qualified alien who has lived in the United States for more than five years. We believe that most of the immigrants still eligible for this benefit are those who have not lived in the United States for five years. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible to receive this benefit.

The Fiscal Bureau also indicates that in January, 2009, the average monthly SOFSP benefit per recipient equaled \$82, which compares with \$97 for all FoodShare recipients. In addition, the average household income for families that included SOFSP recipients equaled \$1,620 per month. On average, these families are well below the poverty line.

We understand that Wisconsin faces a very difficult budget shortfall. However, we believe that eliminating the FoodShare benefits at a time when this group of vulnerable residents needs them most is unconscionable. Therefore, we support alternative 3 in budget paper #443. This would preserve SOFSP and provide adequate funding to handle projected caseload increases. In the context of a \$60 billion budget, this is not the largest item, but for people who rely on SOFSP it is the difference between some level of nutrition security and hunger.

Thank you for listening to our concerns.