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## Nonprofits press food stamp issue

Groups want to change county's approach, build enrollment

By Jeff McDonald, Union-Tribune Staff Writer

2:00 a.m. April 21, 2009

Volunteers who work with poor families are glad the county is trying to get more food stamps in the hands of eligible people, but they want the Board of Supervisors to do more than the plan up for approval this morning.

Advocates for the needy intend to ask supervisors to delay consideration of a three-year road map designed by the Health and Human Services Agency.

"I've gone over their plan and it's not hitting the center of the problem," said Joni Halpern, a San Diego attorney and director of the Supportive Parents Information Network, or SPIN.

Nick Macchione, director of the county Health and Human Services Agency, said advocates and county leaders have the same priority: getting more people enrolled in the federal program that provides food assistance to needy families.

"They're questioning some of our processes and strategies, and we haven't even implemented them," he said. "We think they will work."

Specifically, SPIN and a community group called the Caring Council want the county to:

- Stop searching the homes of food-stamp applicants who are suspected of lying on their application, or who are also seeking welfare.
- Allow applicants to apply at any county office rather than require them to appear at the office nearest their home.
- Hire more social workers to process the growing caseload of applications.
- Promote phone and online applications to save people a trip to the welfare office and a lengthy wait to see a caseworker.
- Lobby state officials to do away with the rule requiring applicants to be fingerprinted.

San Diego County has been under pressure to enroll more people in the program, which is almost entirely funded by the federal government. For years enrollments in the county have ranked last among 24 major urban areas in the nation, according to an advocacy group.

The county's three-year plan calls for working with nonprofits to publicize the program, pre-screening applicants at schools, libraries and senior centers and automatically screening Medi-Cal patients.

The county plan under consideration today requires no additional money.

The community groups' recommendations were formulated after interviews with nearly 200 clients, mostly single mothers who saw deficiencies in the application process.

Critics have long complained that the county puts too much emphasis on preventing fraud and not enough on providing services.

The distinction is critical because many people in need struggle with the social stigma often associated with seeking public assistance, experts say. An unwelcoming culture can drive applicants away.

"People start with a level of shame and then they go to the county, where they get treated with disrespect," said William Oswald, a Springfield College sociologist and Caring Council volunteer. "It's beyond the individual caseworker; it's the whole process."

SPIN and the Caring Council want the county to spruce up welfare offices. Visitors are met by security guards and metal detectors, then they speak to a caseworker who is behind a bulletproof partition before being directed to wait an average of four hours for an application review, the study said.

Macchione said the agency is trying to improve service and streamline application, but the security measures are staying put.

"We have some upset people there," he said. "We've got to keep safety in mind, but I think we can still do that with professional courtesy."

### OVERVIEW

**Background:** Officials have drafted a plan to boost the use of food stamps in San Diego County, which has had the nation's lowest percentage of eligible clients signed up, according to an advocacy group.

**What's new:** Advocacy groups want the plan delayed, so their survey of nearly 200 poor families can be taken into account.

**What's next:** The San Diego County Board of Supervisors will consider the request at 9 a.m. today in the third-floor chambers, 1600 Pacific Highway, San Diego.

**Online:** Read the 21-page preliminary report on food stamps by two advocacy groups at [uniontrib.com/more/documents](http://uniontrib.com/more/documents)



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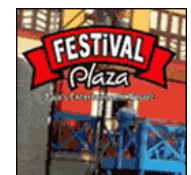
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**ASBM** 04/21/2009 02:17 PM

I would rather my tax money go to feeding my fellow human beings than the trillions going to war. I want my neighbors, community and country to all be fed, healthy, and employed. Not because I believe in handouts...but because I want to be safe!

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**LocalYocal** 04/21/2009 12:19 PM

The local church of food pantry charity used to handle these matters. What happened to that? Shouldn't those groups be the ones who help the hungry? Where are they are why are they not handling this situation? Only after passing through their gates should any federal assistance be provided.

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**scherrygirl** 04/21/2009 11:33 AM

You cant trade or sell food stamps. they are on an EBT card, like a debit card. You are not able to purchase alcohol with them. If you lose your EBT card or sell it, you are SOL and get nothing. where the system is off...the income calculations. I have a family that is receiving unemployment at the moment. when asked his income he qualifies monetarily. BUT, when food stamps actually does the "real" calculation, because unemployment is 2 times a month, they assume the extra income for the last 3 days of the month and that puts a family OVER the income guideline. Therefore, they are not qualifying based on assumed income and not what they are actually receiving which would qualify them. OUCH!!

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**gorgor** 04/21/2009 11:20 AM

It's a good thing they raised taxes and service fees. The welfare leeches almost had to do something for themselves! 1 person liked this comment.

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**surfmutt619** 04/21/2009 10:57 AM

Why aren't those receiving this subsistence doing something to earn it, like while waiting for a potential employer to call their home to offer them a job, they could staff these food warehouses and work for what they are getting.

You need to have checks to make sure that those receiving the aid are in fact needy. I've seen many homes that were receiving gov't aid and they had wide screen tv's in every room, a new car parked in the driveway, and all at the expense of the American taxpayer.

2 people liked this comment.

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*JoetheCat* 04/21/2009 09:59 AM

Why should there be a 'welcoming culture' for welfare? If these volunteer groups want to help out, donate the money to cover these improvements. Sticking out your hand for money for somebody else is not necessarily better than sticking out your hand for money for yourself. Either way, the taxpayer gets screwed.

2 people liked this comment.

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• *talkingsparrow* 04/21/2009 09:21 AM

\*\*\*\*\*Stop searching the homes of food-stamp applicants who are suspected of lying on their application, or who are also seeking welfare.

\*\*\*\*\*Allow applicants to apply at any county office rather than require them to appear at the office nearest their home.

\*\*\*\*\*Hire more social workers to process the growing caseload of applications.

\*\*\*\*\*Promote phone and online applications to save people a trip to the welfare office and a lengthy wait to see a caseworker.

\*\*\*\*\*Lobby state officials to do away with the rule requiring applicants to be fingerprinted.

Are you kidding me? If they're NOT committing fraud they have NOTHING to worry about.

2 people liked this comment.

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• *JustSkip* 04/21/2009 09:07 AM

WHO SAYS ILLEGALS ALIENS ARE NOT COSTING US ANYTHING

THEY ALSO GET FOOD STAMSP FOR THEIR ANCHOR BABIES

WASHINGTON (AP) — The IRS allowed foreign workers — many of them in the U.S. illegally — to improperly claim nearly \$7 billion in child tax credits from 2004 to 2007, a government investigator said Thursday.

Most of the credits went to workers who didn't make enough money to pay any federal income taxes,

J. Russell George, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, said in a report. In those cases, the workers received payments from the Internal Revenue Service after filing income tax returns.

SOURCE L.A. Times

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3 people liked this comment.

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• *SparkyOne* 04/21/2009 08:30 AM

mini-mental state exams for every politician prior to every vote.

1 person liked this comment.

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• *DADSGETNDOWN* 04/21/2009 08:28 AM

Surveyed 200 THAT'S IT ? what a joke.

Where did they get them from ? the corner 12th and market ? something like that.

"Advocacy groups want the plan delayed, so their survey of nearly 200 poor families can be taken into account"

2 people liked this comment.

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• *jnojr* 04/21/2009 08:17 AM

Drug tests for all welfare recipients.

2 people liked this comment.

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• *sfmtc98* 04/21/2009 09:02 AM

Your bumper sticker sounds appealing to many, I'm sure, but could you be a little more specific? What's the connection you seek to 'fix' between drugs and welfare. You can't buy drugs with a food card. Plus, alcoholics, pain huffers and gamblers wouldn't be affected. What happens if they fail? If they get benefits taken away, do the children also? What if they have pot in their system from 2 months ago? Who will pay for all the drug testing that has to take place?

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• [OutObama](#) 04/21/2009 09:52 AM

Well... you certainly have been cloistered. The scam artists and addicts trade their food stamps and welfare benefits for DRUGS.

Shocking isn't it?

2 people liked this comment.

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• [handler](#) 04/21/2009 07:41 AM

The Sups infer that the foodstamps are at no cost to SD county. Remember this is coming from your federal taxes. There is no such thing as free food. Someone pays.

I didn't see any requirement that all foodstamp users be drug free, what happened?

I support requirements that cut down on abuse, fingerprinting is one. Allowing online application makes it easier to abuse the system. Selling and trading foodstamps is widely discussed among users. Fingerprinting and checking users will minimized abuse.

3 people liked this comment.

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• [sfmc98](#) 04/21/2009 07:27 AM

First, I support food stamps. BUT I know that its not a settled issue. The comments to come on this board will reflect that. Journalistically, there is no mention of this in the article.

It reads:

"Nick Macchione, director of the county Health and Human Services Agency, said advocates and county leaders have the same priority: getting more people enrolled in the federal program that provides food assistance to needy families."

Its interesting how this article starts from the point that we should be getting more people on them instead of being more expository about the potential social and financial ramifications. They should include at least one, brief opposing view. How about asking "is getting more people enrolled what we want as a culture?" or "Isn't the difficulty and even the shame of the process a helpful barrier?" Maybe folks will try to work harder instead of what could be called an easy way out. Maybe not, but at least address it.

6 people liked this comment.

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• [fdbiddle](#) 04/21/2009 05:22 AM

Why don't we drop all requirements. That way everyone can use tax dollars. Maybe even those that pay the taxes will be able to benefit from such.

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