

# County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency



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**DATE:** August 31, 2020

**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

**FROM:** Robert Menicocci, Social Services Agency Director

**SUBJECT: SSA Off Agenda Report Regarding Maximizing CalFresh Benefits for Veterans**

At the July 21, 2020, Board of Supervisors (Board) meeting, the Board directed Administration to provide an off-agenda report and timeline for the implementation of a nutrition benefit program for veterans in response to its request to maximize CalFresh benefits for veterans.

## Implementation Plan

The Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBS) and the Veterans Services Office (VSO) worked in collaboration to develop an implementation plan to issue a \$50 grocery gift card (Safeway) to supplement CalFresh benefits for veterans residing in Santa Clara County.

DEBS would provide validation of eligible veterans to VSO each month, and VSO would distribute the retail grocery gift cards to eligible veterans. It is anticipated that this partnership will incentivize participation in CalFresh from the VSO referring potentially eligible veterans who may not already be enrolled in CalFresh, as well increase referrals from DEBS to VSO for veterans to take advantage of veterans benefits while picking up their \$50 grocery gift card.

An increased number of referrals to the VSO would provide the opportunity to encourage more veterans to utilize US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. These benefits include the possibility of veterans attaining Service-Connected Disability Compensation, a monetary compensation benefit related to a veteran's injuries during service, as well as VA Pension benefits, a monetary benefit for wartime veterans with limited income and/or income reducing medical costs.

Although the VA claims process is lengthy, if benefits are established, the number of veterans in need of public assistance may decrease. This would result in a mutually beneficial situation for the County, which could experience a reduction in benefits paid

out of the general fund, and the veterans, who would obtain a stable monthly income from the federal government.

### Progress Update

The County's program to supplement CalFresh benefits by issuing grocery gift cards to veterans on CalFresh will begin after Emergency Allotments have been discontinued. Emergency Allotments are approved by the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service on a month-to-month basis until the Secretary of Health and Human Services rescinds the public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On August 20, 2020, the State announced that California has been approved to issue Emergency Allotments for September 2020, with an issuance date in October. Thus, the County's program would not begin until October 2020, with an issuance date in November. Should the Emergency Allotments continue to be extended, the County's program would be implemented accordingly, and would seamlessly commence at the conclusion of the Emergency Allotment program.

Currently, the Social Services Agency's (SSA) Financial Management Services Department is working with the County's Controller-Treasurer Department to expedite the gift card approval process, which is required of any department seeking to establish a gift card program. It is anticipated that the SSA will obtain the necessary approval prior to the first potential disbursement in November 2020.

Shortly before the launch date, DEBS will promote this valuable program by various means of advertising, including sending letters, emails, and robotexts to participants, as well as using social media to increase veterans' awareness of and participation in CalFresh and the Veterans Services Office.

C: Chief Board Aides  
Miguel Márquez, Chief Operating Officer  
James R. Williams, County Counsel  
Megan Doyle, Clerk of the Board