

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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May 13, 2025

Governor Gavin Newsom
State Capitol
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Request for Federal Waiver to Restrict CalFresh Benefits for Sugary Beverages and Candy

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of the Shasta County Board of Supervisors, we write to urge you to take decisive action to improve the health of Californians by seeking a federal waiver to prohibit the use of CalFresh benefits for the purchase of sugar-sweetened beverages and candy. This initiative aligns with recent federal efforts and addresses significant health concerns impacting our community.

As you may be aware, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has recently advocated for states to restrict the use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funds for purchasing sugary drinks and processed foods. He has encouraged governors across the country to apply for waivers to implement these changes, emphasizing the detrimental health effects of such products.

The consumption of high-sugar products like sodas and candies is strongly linked to obesity, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic conditions. Research has shown that even adding one sugary drink per day is associated with an approximately 18% increased risk of cardiovascular disease, regardless of physical activity levels.¹ These health issues not only diminish quality of life but also contribute to increased healthcare costs and economic burdens on communities.

The impact of diet-related health issues is particularly concerning in Shasta County²:

- **Diabetes and Obesity Prevalence:** The adult diabetes prevalence in Shasta County is 12.4%, compared to the state average of 8.8%. Additionally, Shasta County's adult obesity rates exceed state averages.

¹ "Sugary drinks increase risk of cardiovascular disease, regardless of how much you exercise." Harvard School of Public Health (2024)

² 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment. Dignity Mercy Medical Center (2022)

- **Diabetes and Heart Disease Mortality:** Shasta County's diabetes mortality rate is 25% higher than the state average, and our heart disease mortality rate is 85% higher than the state average.
- **Premature Death Rate:** Shasta County's life expectancy is 5.5 years less than the state average, with almost twice the rate of premature death, largely driven by chronic disease.

These statistics underscore the urgent need for policy interventions to promote healthier dietary habits within our community, especially as more residents in our county rely on CalFresh benefits. By seeking a federal waiver to restrict the use of CalFresh benefits for purchasing sugar-sweetened beverages and candy, California can lead the nation in promoting nutritional health among low-income populations. This policy change would encourage healthier purchasing choices, reduce the prevalence of diet-related diseases, and alleviate the associated economic and social burdens.

We appreciate your commitment to the well-being of Californians and urge you to take this critical step toward fostering a healthier future for our state.

Sincerely,

Kevin W. Crye, Chair
Board of Supervisors
County of Shasta

cc: California State Association of Counties
Rural County Representatives of California
Shaw, Yoder, Antwih, and Lange