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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I have signed with considerable reluctance H.R. 14514, a bill which would permit the State of California to provide direct financial assistance rather than food stamps to beneficiaries of the Supplemental Security Income program in that State, under certain conditions. The Supplemental Security Income program and the food stamp program are both national in scope, and it should not be necessary to enact a special bill because of the situation in a particular State.

The Congress has for many years been aware of the deficiencies in legislation affecting the eligibility for food stamps of Supplemental Security Income recipients. The situation in California is only one result of the failure of the Congress to enact my comprehensive food stamp reform bill which is essential for improved administration of the food stamp program in all States. Making exceptions for special situations is a poor substitute for definitive corrective legislative action on the food stamp program.

Another disturbing aspect of H.R. 14514 is that if California elects to continue to provide cash instead of food stamps after 1976, the bill would require that the State pass through to SSI recipients all cost-of-living increases in the Federal SSI amount. My Administration has opposed the principle of a mandatory pass-through for States in the past, because it would limit the States' discretion to decide their own supplementary benefit levels. I recognize that this legislation would permit California to remove itself from the congressionally imposed restriction upon action by the State legislature. Nevertheless, I do not believe that the Federal Government should mandate varying levels of SSI benefits in all States simply because a few States in prior years elected to give recipients cash in place of food stamps.

I recognize that some interim resolution of the uncertain situation in California is necessary, in the interest of the senior citizens and other SSI recipients. Therefore, I am signing this bill. I must, however, state my strong objection to the use of such narrowly focused remedies instead of proceeding with the broad reforms that are needed.

I urge the Congress to act without further delay on my food stamp reform proposals that have been before it since October 1975.

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