



SPUR

San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

May 11, 2020

Senator Scott Wiener
State Capitol, Room 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for SB 882 (Wiener) – CalFresh Simpler for Seniors

Dear Senator Wiener:

On behalf of SPUR I am writing in support of your bill SB 882, which would simplify the CalFresh application for many older adults and people with disabilities, while also making permanent several key changes to increase access to CalFresh during the COVID-19 pandemic. SB 882 would eliminate burdensome, ongoing reporting requirements that cause many households to lose nutrition assistance, even when they remain eligible. SB 882 would also ensure that all applicants and participants can complete the application and recertification interview processes by phone, including submitting the required client signature.

Data from 2015 revealed that only 19 percent of eligible older adults (age 60 or over) were participating in the CalFresh program, which, at the time, made our state the worst in the nation when it comes enrolling eligible older adults in this federally-funded food assistance program.¹ While our enrollment numbers have no doubt improved since the change last year to CalFresh eligibility for seniors receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), we still need to do more to make it easy for seniors to sign up – and stay on – CalFresh.

The need to streamline CalFresh application processes is more urgent than ever. The number of new CalFresh applications is surging due to the economic downturn and unprecedented unemployment. Weekly CalFresh application volume at the end of March 2020 was more than double that of one year prior,² and the spike in application volume shows no sign of tapering off in the near future. With state, county, and outreach partner capacity stretched to the limit, operational efficiency must be a top priority, as reflected in the federal waivers the state is now implementing. In order to address the tremendous need brought on by the crisis and support the recovery effort, it is vital that the state extend CalFresh policy and business process flexibilities wherever possible.

Prior to the pandemic-induced recession we are currently facing, California needed to make it easier for eligible residents to access food assistance. Now, it's more important than ever.

¹ Food Research and Action Center and AARP Foundation, <https://frac.org/maps/seniors/senior-snap-rates.html>

² CDSS Research and Data Reports, COVID-19 Safety Net Weekly Applications, available at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/research-and-data>

For these reasons, we strongly support SB 882 and thank you for your leadership to improve access to CalFresh.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Zigas', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eli Zigas
Food and Agriculture Policy Director

cc: Senator Hurtado, Chair, Senate Human Services Committee
Jared Call, California Food Policy Advocates (sponsor)
Meg Davidson, San Francisco-Marin Food Bank (co-sponsor)
Blanca E. Castro-Paszinski, AARP California (co-sponsor)
Andrew Cheyne, California Association of Food Banks (co-sponsor)