



SPUR

San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

April 6, 2021

The Honorable Jim Wood
Chairman, Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for AB 368 (Bonta): Food Prescriptions

Dear Chairman Wood:

SPUR requests your support of AB 368 (Bonta), legislation that will establish a two-year "Food Prescription" pilot in partnership with Medi-Cal managed care plans in three California counties. The pilots will provide medically-supportive food to approximately 2,400 Medi-Cal beneficiaries who have one or more chronic health condition(s). The legislation aims to directly address racial health disparities, chronic disease, healthcare costs, and healthcare utilization among Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

COVID-19 is exacerbating already high levels of hunger and health disparities, especially among communities of color and those with underlying medical conditions. Since the start of the pandemic, the number of Black and Latinx people reporting food insecurity has doubled, with nearly 30% reporting they struggle to afford enough food on a consistent basis¹. More broadly, 21% of Californians report insufficient access to food. California can begin to address these disparities, improve the health of people throughout the state, and reduce health care costs California by supporting produce prescription pilots through AB 368.

Food Prescriptions like those proposed in AB 368 are a way to prevent, reverse, and manage common chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension. These are the very conditions that put an individual at higher risk for severe COVID-19 infections and disproportionately affect communities of color². To fight the current pandemic and prepare for the future, California should invest the prevention of severe medical conditions through food prescriptions.

As we noted in our report *Healthy Food Within Reach*, what we eat has a strong influence on our

¹ Schanzenbach D & Tomeh N. Visualizing Food Insecurity: Weekly Food Insecurity Rates during Covid-19. <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/state-food-insecurity.html>. Last accessed April 2, 2021.

² COVID-19 Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity. Centers for Disease Control. April 2, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

likelihood of developing diet-related diseases such as diabetes.³ These health conditions don't just impact individuals lives but burden the health care system through increased hospitalizations and treatment costs. By looking upstream towards food-based interventions California can both improve patient health and save health care costs.

For these reasons, we strongly support AB 368 and urge your "aye" vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katie R. Ettman".

Katie Ettman
Food and Agriculture Senior Policy Associate

CC: Members, Assembly Health Committee

³ SPUR, *Healthy Food Within Reach*, February 2015: www.spur.org/foodaccess