

**SPUR**

San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

May 14, 2021

The Honorable Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez  
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee  
California State Capitol, Room 2114  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: AB 221 (Santiago) – Emergency Food Assistance for All – SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Gonzalez:

On behalf of SPUR, I am writing in support of AB 221 (Santiago) as amended on April 5, 2021. This bill would provide \$600 of emergency food assistance for low-income persons negatively impacted by COVID-19, regardless of legal status. The bill also requires the Department of Social Services (CDSS) to conduct a study to inform a set of recommendations for a permanent food assistance program that meets the needs of all food insecure Californians.

COVID-19 has devastated California's economy and has led to dramatically increased rates of food insecurity. This crisis has disproportionately affected certain groups, particularly our community of over two million undocumented immigrants who live and work in California. As of May, the US Census estimates that one in five households in California is food insecure, which translates to approximately 8 million people struggling to find enough to eat. This is a dramatic increase of more than 50% from the average reported level of food insecurity in California between 2017-19.<sup>1</sup> Within this troubling overall picture, there are deep racial and ethnic disparities, with Latinx and Black families reporting disproportionately higher levels of food insecurity than other Californians.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, some citizens are eligible for CalFresh, a federally funded program which provides monthly food benefits to low-income individuals and families. However, undocumented immigrants are ineligible for CalFresh. California's undocumented immigrants are an integral part of our society who pay taxes and are risking their lives to perform essential services that keep the state running and put food on our tables. Ironically, however, there are no public food assistance programs to support them should they or someone in their family contract COVID-19 or lose their job. It is imperative that California extend food assistance to undocumented immigrants.

In order to provide eligible California residents with enough support to withstand this crisis, AB 221 would provide \$600 of emergency food assistance via a preloaded food card to eligible individuals. To minimize costs to the state, and maximize the privacy of community members, the bill would use

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<sup>1</sup> Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2019*, ERR-275, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (2020), page 22: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=99281>

<sup>2</sup> Northwestern University, Schanzenbach, D. S., & Tomeh, N. T. (2020, July). *Visualizing Food Insecurity*. <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/state-food-insecurity.html>

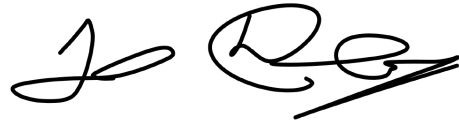
proven practices from programs administered by food banks and other non-profits to safely and efficiently distribute this benefit via pre-loaded food cards.

Given the resources currently available to the state, and being home to the largest immigrant and refugee population, California has the ability and responsibility to take urgent action to expand our social safety net and help millions of people meet their basic needs. For these reasons SPUR supports AB 221 as one of the steps the state should adopt and urges your 'aye' vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Zigas'.

Eli Zigas  
Food and Agriculture Policy Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Denney'.

Jacob Denney  
Economic Justice Policy Director