



SPUR

San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

May 24, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Supporting “Food for All” Budget Investment to Expand Access to the California Food Assistance Program

Dear Budget Leaders:

On Behalf of SPUR, we are writing to respectfully request your support for an investment in the 2021-2022 Budget Act to create an equitable state food assistance system that does not discriminate on the basis of immigration status.

The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating hunger and hardship for many Californians, particularly our community of over two million undocumented immigrants who live and work in California.¹ 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 2017-19.²

Despite their many contributions – to our state’s economy, tax base, and social fabric – the vast majority of immigrants are explicitly denied access to our most effective anti-hunger programs: CalFresh and the state-funded California Food Assistance Program. This exclusion exacerbates racial disparities in health and wealth, and hinders California’s ability to weather this, and future, recessions.

California established the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) in response to 1996 federal welfare reform that ended SNAP eligibility for many documented immigrants, but it

¹ Joseph Hayes and Laura Hill, “Just the Facts: Undocumented Immigrants in California,” *Public Policy Institute of California*: <https://www.ppic.org/publication/undocumented-immigrants-in-california/>

² 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>

wasn't made fully inclusive. Current laws exclude undocumented immigrants, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and certain visa holders from federal SNAP/CalFresh and CFAP eligibility. Today, CFAP serves about 38,000 "qualified immigrants" who lost federal SNAP eligibility, but many more could be reached if we modernize the program to accurately reflect the needs and makeup of California's immigrant population.³

To effectively address increasing food insecurity, reduce poverty and homelessness, and support California's recovery from the impact of COVID-19, it is critical that our state modernize CFAP and bring equity to our state's safety net. Until all California residents can access food assistance when they need it, our institutions will not fully reflect the state's values of equity and inclusion.

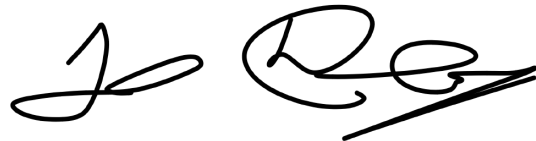
For these reasons, we urgently request an ongoing budget investment to modernize the California Food Assistance Program to provide state-funded nutrition benefits to any Californian ineligible for CalFresh solely due to their immigration status.

Ensuring immigrant Californians are treated equitably and have sufficient food are important steps toward addressing hunger that has worsened during the COVID-19 crisis. We hope you will support a budget that allows Californians — regardless of immigration status — to have the food they need.

Sincerely,



Eli Zigas
Food and Agriculture Policy Director



Jacob Denney
Economic Justice Policy Director

³ <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/research-and-data/calfresh-data-tables/dfa256>