

April 11, 2023

The Honorable Marie Alvarado-Gil
Chair, Senate Human Services Committee
1020 N Street, Room 521
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for Senate Bill 600 (Mejivar) – CalFresh Minimum Benefit Adequacy Act

Dear Chairwoman Alvarado-Gil:

On behalf of the SPUR, I am writing in support of Senate Bill 600 (Menjivar) – CalFresh Minimum Benefit Adequacy Act of 2023. At a time when CalFresh recipients are facing the dual burden of elevated food costs and a looming hunger cliff, it is critical that the state does everything it can to boost CalFresh benefits, particularly for those who receive meager and inadequate allotments below \$50 per month.

As we noted in our report *Healthy Food Within Reach*, maximizing enrollment in federally funded food assistance programs is one of the best strategies we have available for improving food security for Californians¹. However, without supplemental support, existing benefit amounts do not provide enough for food insecure individuals and families to meet their actual food needs. California should improve food security by improving benefit adequacy.

More than five million Californians have experienced a devastating cut to their CalFresh benefits as federally funded “Emergency Allotments” ended in March 2023. The average CalFresh household lost \$200 per month. Many households, such as older adults living alone, saw their benefits slashed from \$281 to the federally-set minimum allotment of \$23 per month. California can — and should — join several other states that have already raised the base level of benefits to help mitigate poverty and food insecurity.

Additionally, we see the CalFresh Minimum Benefit Adequacy Act as complementary to another bill under consideration by the legislature that would help families afford food: The CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits Expansion - AB 605 (Arambula). The Minimum Benefit Adequacy Act will ensure that nobody on CalFresh receives less than \$50 each month. Alongside this raising of the CalFresh floor, the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefit Expansion would raise the ceiling of benefits for all participants, regardless of their benefit levels, by providing up to \$60 per month in additional benefits.

Together, these two bills will help Californians put more food on the table at a time of escalating food costs. It is for these reasons SPUR is pleased to SUPPORT SB 600.

Sincerely,



Eli Zigas
Food and Agriculture Policy Director



Katie Ettman
Food and Agriculture Policy Manager

¹ SPUR, *Healthy Food Within Reach*, 2015: https://www.spur.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/SPUR_Healthy_Food_Within_Reach_Report.pdf