**SB 882 Sample Support Letter**

**SB 882 (Wiener)** seeks to make permanent improvements to ease access to CalFresh, especially for older adults and people with disabilities. COVID-19 pandemic conditions are increasing the already high number of Californians experiencing food insecurity. This is placing low-income older adults and people with disabilities at increased risk for serious harm.

As a proven positive health intervention and powerful economic stabilizer, CalFresh has a critical dual role to play in California’s immediate and long-term COVID-19 response. Yet, only 19 percent of eligible older Californians (age 60 or over) receive CalFresh, the lowest participation rate of any state. As the number of new CalFresh applications is surging due to the economic downturn and spiking unemployment, **now is the time to make permanent improvements to ease access to CalFresh**

SB 882 would simplify the CalFresh application for many older adults and people with disabilities, and eliminate burdensome, ongoing reporting requirements that cause many households to lose nutrition assistance, even though they remain eligible. It would also ensure all applicants and participants can complete the application and recertification interview processes by phone, including the required client signature.

**How you can help:** We encourage you to use this sample letter or write their own in support of SB 882. After sending a letter, please share your support via social media, emails, and calls as well!

**Please submit your letter of support now!**

**Letters of support should be sent before May 12, 2020**

**Please email letters to** [**Brayden.Borcherding@sen.ca.gov**](http://Brayden.Borcherding@sen.ca.gov)**;** [**jared@cfpa.net**](mailto:jared@cfpa.net)

**AND**

**submit directly through the State’s online Advocate Portal for Legislative Position Letters:**

[**https://calegislation.lc.ca.gov/Advocates/**](https://calegislation.lc.ca.gov/Advocates/)

**\*Note: You will need to create an account for yourself/your organization to upload letters through the portal.**

**Organizations: please be sure to submit your letter on letterhead.**

**Individuals: please be sure to include your mailing address in your letter.**

**Questions?** Contact Jared Call at 323.401.4972 or [jared@cfpa.net](mailto:jared@cfpa.net)

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**[Date]**

The Honorable Scott Wiener

Senator, 11th Senate District

State Capitol, Room 5100

Sacramento, CA 95814

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

Dear Senator Wiener,

**[I am/Name of your organization is]** writing in support of SB 882 (Wiener), legislation that 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.

Hunger and poverty are persistent problems in California that are being exacerbated by the COVID-19 public health emergency. Before the crisis began there were more than 4.1 million low-income households affected by food insecurity,[[1]](#footnote-1) and the number of older Californians experiencing hunger continues to grow at an alarming rate. Nearly forty percent of low-income Californians over the age of sixty are food insecure -- a 21 percent increase over the last 15 years.[[2]](#footnote-2) Food insecurity has significant negative impacts on older adults -- particularly on their health. Older adults who are food-insecure are more likely to die of a heart attack, have depression, and face limitations in activities of daily living. Food insecurity therefore places an already vulnerable population at increased risk for more serious health and economic hardships from COVID-19.

As a proven public positive public health intervention and powerful economic stabilizer, CalFresh has a critical dual role to play in California’s immediate COVID-19 response and long-term recovery efforts.[[3]](#footnote-3) Yet, in California, only 19 percent of eligible older adults (age 60 or over) are served by the program.[[4]](#footnote-4) In fact, California ranks last in the nation when it comes to enrolling eligible older adults in CalFresh (or SNAP, as it is known federally).

In order to improve food security, reduce poverty and homelessness, and support California’s recovery from the effects of COVID-19, it is critical that we simplify access to CalFresh for older adults and people with disabilities.

**[I/We]** support SB 882 because **[choose any of the following reasons or add your own]**

* **California has persistently lagged behind the rest of the nation when it comes to connecting low-income seniors with CalFresh.** Only 19 percent of eligible adults over age 60 participate in CalFresh—the worst SNAP participation rate of any state. In order to reduce food insecurity and provide more economic stability in the face of the COVID-19 emergency and its aftermath, it is critical that we simplify access to CalFresh for older adults and people with disabilities now.
* **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,[[5]](#footnote-5) 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 is the 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.
* **CalFresh access and customer service varies significantly across the state**, leading to major inequities. Enrollment processes are often burdensome, especially for older adults, non-English speakers, and the working poor. Regardless of where they live or their individual circumstances, all eligible Californians should have equitable access to vital food assistance needed to live healthy, productive lives. This includes having the option to complete the application and reporting processes completely by phone, as clients in only 20 out of 58 counties currently can, and as is temporarily statewide available due to new federal waivers meant to ease access during the COVID-19 emergency.
* **CalFresh helps our communities thrive.** In 2016, Over 1.7 million Californians missed out on the nutrition benefits of CalFresh. If all those eligible were enrolled, the state would have garnered nearly $2 billion more in federal dollars annually, generating over $3 billion in economic activity annually.[[6]](#footnote-6) With caseloads rapidly growing, closing the CalFresh participation gap can help meet our shared goals of improving public health and stimulating economic activity.

As the COVID-19 crisis continues to make clear, meeting the nutritional needs of low-income households is an urgent and ongoing need. No one should go hungry in the great state of California, and it is our collective responsibility to use all the tools we have to make it easier for food-insecure older adults and people with disabilities to access our most powerful anti-hunger tool, CalFresh.

**[If you prefer, insert your own reason here.]**

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

Sincerely,

**[Your name and title]**

**[Your organization, if applicable]**

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)

1. CFPA Factsheet, https://cfpa.net/GeneralNutrition/CFPAPublications/FoodInsecurity-Factsheet-2019.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. (2001-2016) California Health Interview Survey Data. Retrieved from <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/chis/data/Pages/GetCHISData.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-nutritional-outcomes-and-lower-health-care>, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/temporary-snap-benefit-bump-a-no-brainer-for-more-economic-stimulus> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Food Research and Action Center and AARP Foundation, <https://frac.org/maps/seniors/senior-snap-rates.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. CDSS Research and Data Reports, COVID-19 Safety Net Weekly Applications, available at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/research-and-data> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. CFPA, *Lost Dollars Empty Plates 2019*, <https://cfpa.net/CalFresh/CFPAPublications/LDEP-FullReport-2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)