



February 15, 2019

The Honorable Holly J. Mitchell
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Richard Pan
Chair, Senate Budget Committee Sub 3
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

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

The Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee Sub 1
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Simplifying Senior Access to CalFresh in the 2019-20 Budget Act

Dear Budget Leaders,

California Food Policy Advocates and the California Association of Food Banks, along with local food banks and anti-hunger partners, advocate on the behalf of low-income Californians to improve their access to sufficient, affordable, nutritious food. We are writing to request investments to improve senior access to CalFresh in the 2019-2020 Budget Act.

California has persistently lagged behind the rest of the nation when it comes to connecting low-income seniors with CalFresh. Only 20 percent of eligible low-income seniors participate in CalFresh—the worst senior SNAP participation rate of any state¹. This low rate of access does not include the SSI population that has been ineligible for CalFresh—it is a measure of our reach among seniors who are currently eligible². In order to maximize the timely and pressing opportunity to enroll SSI recipients into CalFresh starting in June 2019, and to reduce stigma and improve access among all low-income seniors, it is critical that we simplify senior access to CalFresh concurrent with the reversal of SSI ‘cashout’ policy.

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has been participating in a federal demonstration project to simplify access to CalFresh for seniors and people with disabilities since October 2017, when CDSS received a waiver to implement the CalFresh Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP). On April 25, 2017, CDSS issued [ACL guidance](#) to outline that ESAP would do three things for elderly (age 60 or older) and/or disabled households:

¹ National Council on Aging. Senior SNAP Visualization. Available at: <https://www.ncoa.org/economic-security/benefits/visualizations/senior-snap-participation/>

² California Department of Social Services. Who Among the Potential Eligible are Not Receiving CalFresh? Application of Neighborhood and Community Level CalFresh Participation Measures. Available at: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/calfreshoutreach/res/RSB-FanOutSlidesFnl.pdf>

1. Waive the recertification interview requirement for elderly and/or disabled households with no earned income.
2. Use data matching to reduce client-provided verifications for elderly and/or disabled households with no earned income.
3. Extend the certification period to 36 months for elderly and/or disabled households with no earned income.

One element of the federal ESAP demonstration project that CDSS has not implemented is a simplified senior application. CDSS does not need further waiver approval to implement a simplified application—this is entirely a state decision. ESAP demonstration projects in other states often make use of a simplified ESAP application. This stands in contrast with CDSS’s guidance for counties to utilize the existing [CF 285 “Application for CalFresh Benefits”](#) for ESAP households, which is a cumbersome, 18 page application.

We therefore respectfully request a one-time investment for CDSS to develop a simplified CalFresh application for seniors and people with disabilities along with the ESAP. With the expansion of CalFresh to include SSI recipients—and a larger, growing aging population that can benefit greatly from improved CalFresh access—this is a small investment with great benefit. Other states that have fully implemented the ESAP and simplified application have seen a cost-savings over time due to the increased efficiency of a simplified process.

No one should go hungry in the great state of California, and it is our collective responsibility to remove long-standing barriers to CalFresh, the most powerful anti-poverty tool at our disposal.³

Sincerely,



Tracey Patterson, California Food Policy Advocates
Andrew Cheyne, California Association of Food Banks
Meg Davidson, SF-Marín Food Bank
Shanti Prasad, Alameda County Community Food Bank

CC: Honorable Toni Atkins, President Pro-Tempore of the California State Senate
Honorable Anthony Rendon, Speaker of the California State
Kim McCoy-Wade, California Department of Social Services
Richard Figueroa, Office of the Governor
Tam Ma, Office of the Governor
Director Keely Bosler, Department of Finance
Chas Alamo, Office of the Legislative Analyst Office

³ Public Policy Institute of California. Poverty in California. Available at: <https://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/>