[DATE]

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

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

The Honorable Richard D. Roth
Chair, Budget Subcommittee on Education
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Kevin McCarty
Chair, Budget Subcommittee on Education
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Investment for California-Grown for Healthy Kids in the 2019-20 Budget Act

Dear Senator Mitchell, Assemblymember Ting, Senator Roth, and Assemblymember McCarty,

Students can't learn when they are hungry – yet more than 2 million California in low-income households are affected by food insecurity.[1] California's cost of living strains household budgets and money for food and leaves working poor families struggling to afford school meals without incurring meal debt. Federally funded, universally free school meals are a critical way to provide California students with the food needed to learn and grow, and a major support for families struggling to make ends meet.

Unfortunately, a student's access to healthy school meals is not just a matter of food availability. There are two remaining barriers to students benefitting from school meals – stigma and the quality of food. An equity-based framework that increases access to nutritious food is needed to address the health and academic disparities that lead to barriers to opportunity for millions of California students.

We, the undersigned, therefore respectfully request an augmentation of $15.3 million in Proposition 98 child nutrition funding for the California-Grown for Healthy Kids Program to increase the provision of fresh, California fruits and vegetables in school districts that provide universally free meals.

The California-Grown for Healthy Kids Program can help children, school districts, and farmers:

For Students: Food is fundamental. California can build upon our strengths – including the healthy, fresh produce grown in our state – to support student health and learning. Many of the students hardest hit by our academic opportunity gap are struggling with economic instability and food insecurity at home, due to generations of systemic inequities in economic opportunity and mobility. Every teacher

[1] Data for this factsheet was drawn from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). 2015-16 Adult, Adolescent, and Child Public Use File. California Health Interview Survey. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. More information about CHIS is available at http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/chis/Pages/default.aspx.

understands that before they can effectively teach, they must address pressing basic needs like hunger. Too many California students miss out on the benefits of school meals. We can address this gap by (1) eliminating the stigma and financial barriers associated with school meals by making them universally free, and (2) serving fresh, appealing, nourishing meals that students want to eat.

For Schools: Rising labor costs and a federal poverty measure for school meal eligibility that is out of line with California's cost of living adds cost pressures to schools; and federal reimbursements have not been adjusted to meet these needs. While the federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act improved nutrition standards for children, schools often struggle fiscally to meet these requirements. Federal nutrition standards requiring one cup of fruit or vegetables to be served at school breakfast were not provided a corresponding increase of federal funding. This program will provide targeted state support so that schools can effectively meet the unfunded federal mandate to serve fruit with breakfast.

For Farmers: California is the largest producer of fresh fruits and vegetables in the nation. "California-Grown" highlights the importance of seeking out and purchasing agricultural products grown and produced in our state. Fiscal incentives for schools to purchase fresh, California-grown produce to nourish our students is mutually beneficial to California school districts, farms, and children.

We respectfully ask that the Legislature and Administration prioritize the needs of students and ensure the promise of education is met. The Budget Committee can take a forward-thinking approach to put California in a stronger position that ensures our state's nutrition assistance efforts are well-equipped to fight hunger and reduce poverty in our state by maximizing our own economy and resources.

Sincerely,

[Add list of organizations in support]

CC: Megan Baier, Senate President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins
Misty Feusahrens, Speaker of the Assembly Anthony Rendon
Jeff Bell, Department of Finance
Alejandro Espinoza, Department of Education
Jenny Johnson, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom