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March 20, 2019

The Honorable Connie M. Leyva
Chair, Senate Education Committee
State Capitol, Room 2083
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Strong support for SB 499 (McGuire) – California Grown for Healthy Kids Act

Dear Chairperson Leyva,

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) requests your support of SB 499 (McGuire), legislation that will create and sustain equitable, healthy, hunger-free schools through an extra 10¢ per breakfast reimbursement for school districts to purchase California-grown fresh fruits and vegetables. To earn this incentive, school districts must, at a minimum, serve breakfast universally free in all schools, and serve breakfast and lunch universally free at very high poverty schools.

CFPA is a statewide policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. As such, we are very concerned about school districts' ability to meet the nutritional needs of low-income students. We strongly believe that SB 499 addresses the persistent food access barriers that come in between students and their ability to learn.

Students can't learn when they are hungry – yet more than 1.7 million California children are food insecure and at-risk for hunger.¹ The cost of living in California is unbearable for many families, which limits financial resources, including adequate money for food. School meals can be a key strategy for getting students the food they need to learn and grow, and major support for families struggling to make ends meet.

Over the past few years, California has seen improvements in access to school meals. Unfortunately, a student's access to healthy school meals is not just a matter of food availability. There are two major remaining barriers to students eating school meals – **stigma** and **quality** of food. SB 499 seeks to help all schools become hunger-free.

We strongly support SB 499 because:

- **A substantial body of research clearly demonstrates that school breakfast significantly improves academic performance and physical and emotional health.** Serving breakfast significantly improves students' cognitive abilities, enabling them to be

¹ Gundersen, C., et al. (2016). [Map the Meal Gap 2016: Food insecurity and child food insecurity estimates at the county level](#). Feeding America.

more alert, pay better attention and perform better on reading, math, and other standardized test scores. Children who eat breakfast also are sick less often, have fewer problems associated with hunger, such as dizziness, lethargy, and stomachaches, and do significantly better than their non-breakfasted peers in terms of cooperation, discipline, and interpersonal behaviors.²

- **Hunger-free schools, where meals are served free to all students, eliminate stigma.** Stigma has long been identified as a significant barrier to participation in school meal programs. Many low-income students choose not to participate in school meals so they are not labeled “poor” by their peers. Federally-funded universal free school meal programs offer a proven solution to many of the barriers that impede participation, including the stigma. When school meals are offered to all students at no charge, this becomes the “default” for all children and helps eliminate stigma.
- **Access to fresh fruits and vegetables in school is important to students and parents.** Children spend a substantial proportion of their time in school, and meals and snacks consumed at school are a major contributor to their total daily dietary needs. Low-income children face numerous challenges to accessing healthy food outside of school, as a result of poverty and community “food insecurity,” including limited access to stores with fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious food.³ We know that parents and students seek healthy meals with fresh ingredients⁴ and evaluations of fresh fruit and vegetable interventions show that with additional resources schools can effectively increase service and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.⁵

For these reasons, we strongly support the *California-Grown for Healthy Kids Act* and request your aye vote on SB 499.

Sincerely,



Elyse Homel Vitale, MPH
Senior Advocate
California Food Policy Advocates

Cc: Senator Mike McGuire

² Brown JL, Beardslee WH, Prothrow-Stith, D. (2008). *Impact of School Breakfast on Children’s Health and Learning: An Analysis of the Scientific Research*.

³ Public Health Law Center (2009). [Promoting Fruits and Vegetables in School: Policy Challenges and Opportunities in a Complex Food Environment](#).

⁴ Revolution Foods. (2018). [Survey Reveals Both Parents and Students Consider Healthy School Meals Crucial to Academic Success](#).

⁵ Olsho, L., Klerman, J., and Barlett, S. (2011). [Food and Nutrition Service Evaluation of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program \(FFVP\): Interim Evaluation Report](#).