

August 3, 2020

Honorable Senator Melissa Hurtado
Chairperson, Human Services Committee
1020 N Street, Room 521
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 826 (Santiago) – **SUPPORT**

Dear Chairperson Hurtado,

On behalf of California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), I write in support of AB 826 (Santiago) as amended on July 2, 2020.

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. We also work to improve access to the federal nutrition programs, and for more effective policy and programmatic alignment between health and nutrition programs. We believe that all Californians, regardless of individual circumstances, deserve access to resources that help them meet their most basic needs.

AB 826 would establish a one-time fund to provide emergency food assistance for undocumented immigrants negatively impacted by COVID-19. Specifically, this bill would establish a one-time fund to provide emergency food assistance for undocumented immigrants impacted by COVID-19 for the duration of the Governor's March 4, 2020 emergency order and for at least 6 months after the order expires. Each eligible person would receive \$300 per month and up to \$600 per household to use only for approved food items.

COVID-19 Impact on Immigrant Californians

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact us all. However undocumented immigrants who live and work in California are being hit the hardest. Undocumented Californians face higher risk of COVID-19 infection and death because they more often work on the frontlines in agriculture, grocery stores, restaurants, and other industries that supply the food we need. Despite their critical roles, many immigrants are excluded from federal relief, including efforts aimed at preventing hunger and helping families meet their basic needs. California took proactive measures to mitigate the dire consequences of COVID-19. Among other things, it provided undocumented Californians disaster relief assistance and Earned Income Tax Credit to ITIN filers who have families with children under six.

However, undocumented Californians' immigration status continues to be a barrier to most federal or state public benefits. This includes access to food assistance programs like CalFresh, our State's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Exclusion from SNAP/CalFresh

CalFresh, the State's most powerful anti-poverty program, is only available to those who meet certain immigration requirements. Parents of U.S. citizens or lawfully present children can apply for benefits for their children. But, this leaves many household members unjustly excluded. Immigrant Californians experience food insecurity at higher rates than their U.S. born counterparts, but have lower rates of participation in CalFresh (eligible immigrants participate at [70% the rate](#) of people born in the U.S). Studies have shown that when parents are ineligible for public benefits assistance, their eligible children are [less likely to participate](#). Exclusion to food assistance harms immigrant families, which in turn harms us all, as we depend on each other to weather this pandemic. Ensuring all members of a family have access to food assistance is critical as we address the COVID-19 hunger crisis.

The Need for AB 826

California's two million undocumented immigrants are an integral part of our society, risking their lives performing essential services that keep California running. Recent [studies](#) show that immigrant Californians make up one-third of all workers in the State; a quarter of these workers are employed in an industry highly affected by the COVID-19 economic shutdown. Immigrant Californians are facing the brunt of the economic downturn driven by COVID-19 because they are essential workers and are excluded from federal relief and other existing food assistance programs.

AB 826 would establish a critical emergency food assistance fund in order to provide undocumented immigrants and their families with enough support to weather through this crisis.

Our collective health during this COVID-19 public health crisis is dependent on ensuring equitable access to food assistance and opportunity for all Californians, regardless of their immigration status. Hunger does not discriminate during this pandemic and neither should we.

For these reasons California Food Policy Advocates supports AB 826 and urges your 'aye' vote.

Sincerely,



Betzabel Estudillo

CC: Assemblymember Miguel Santiago (Author)
Joseph Villela, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (Sponsor)
Members, California Senate Human Services Committee