

## Opportunity



**We all deserve food, dignity, and meaningful opportunities to thrive.**

It's time to put California values into action.

It's time for Californians to unite, as we have before, to fight for policies that improve circumstances for all.

It's time to honor promises made – and to honor the promise of all Californians. We can dismantle the racist and classist structures that perpetuate deep inequities in health, education, poverty, and hunger.

We can uphold the promise to care for one another.

**Together, we can make California hunger free.**

## Call to Action

### Hunger-Free Preschool: Food with Care

Alarming, one quarter of California's children live in poverty. **With the cost of living relentlessly outpacing parents' wages, nearly two million California children lack consistent access to food.**

Unlike K-12 students in California public schools, low-income children in our public pre-K classrooms are not guaranteed access to nutritious meals during the school day. Although public pre-K programs can voluntarily make meals available, not all do. As we expand access to public pre-K, we must guarantee that children in need have access to nutrition at this critical stage of development.

Furthermore, independent child care programs serving low-income children increasingly struggle to afford nutritious meals for children in their care. During the recession, the State cut funding available to the vast majority of licensed child care facilities for nutritious meals. These cuts were never restored. As a result, now only one third of licensed child care centers provide healthy, balanced meals through the Child Care Food Program. **California's child development programs can protect young children from hunger and help close opportunity gaps that begin well before kindergarten.**

**ACTION:** Ensure that low-income children in public pre-K have access to nutritious, free or low-cost meals. Provide state funding for child care programs to serve nutritious meals to low-income children in their care.



## Hunger-Free Schools: California Fresh and Fair Food



Food is fundamental. In a state that grows fresh produce to feed the nation, no child should go without.

**Providing healthy school meals universally free to all students is the best way to create hunger-free schools.**

It cuts red tape and paperwork, decreases stigma among students, and helps meet true levels of need in our schools.

Recent changes to state policy have catalyzed **real progress** in getting federally-funded, universally free meals into our schools. Still, many California schools face significant hurdles in their efforts to serve fresh, healthy, and appealing meals to all students experiencing need.

**Fresh California food should feed California kids.** We can empower schools to better support students by serving free, healthy meals made with fresh, California fruits and vegetables. By investing in school meals, we can reduce social segregation within schools, improve educational outcomes, and support local farmers.

**ACTION:** Help create and sustain hunger-free schools by increasing their capacity to provide healthy school meals – made with California-grown fruits and vegetables – free of charge to all students.

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## Hunger-Free Communities: CalFresh Connect

Despite our economic wealth and agricultural abundance, more than one in ten California households are food insecure. We can, and must, do better.

CalFresh moves Californians out of poverty more effectively than any other program, but we lag far behind other states in connecting eligible people to this federal resource. Reversal of the **SSI 'cashout' policy** is a pivotal opportunity to improve CalFresh enrollment, as SSI clients (seniors & people with disabilities) become CalFresh-eligible for the first time in years.



**Access to CalFresh varies significantly across different parts of the state, leading to major inequities.**

CalFresh enrollment processes are burdensome, especially for seniors and the working poor. For example, despite CalFresh being a federal, statewide program, only nine counties complete applications by phone. Additionally, many Californians who receive Medi-Cal are eligible for CalFresh. However, they are not easily enrolled into CalFresh, even though the same local departments administer both programs. These barriers undermine the health of low-income Californians and shortchange the potential of the safety net.

An integrated safety net gives people a better chance to break the cycle of poverty, hunger, and poor health.

**Hunger is a solvable problem if we realize the potential of our most powerful tool: CalFresh.**

**ACTION:** Ensure all eligible Californians have efficient, equitable access to CalFresh by phone, online, and in person through dignified means and within an integrated safety net that supports health and well-being.