**SB 107 (Wiener) Sample Support Letter**

**SB 107 (Wiener)** will make it easier for the most vulnerable Californians to access vital food assistance. This urgent and common sense bill will create a simplified CalFresh application for older adults and people with disabilities and ensure that people can continue to complete applications and other forms by phone, as is currently being allowed during the pandemic.

COVID-19 is exacerbating already high levels of hunger and hardship, particularly among older adults and people with disabilities. As our largest food and nutrition assistance program, CalFresh has a critical role to play in California’s immediate COVID-19 response and long-term recovery efforts. Yet because of the complicated and burdensome application process, only a fraction of eligible older Californians (age 60 or over) and only 70 percent of all eligible households are enrolled in the program. In order to better connect low-income Californians with ongoing federal food assistance, it is critical that we exercise every available option to simplify access to CalFresh.

**How you can help:** We encourage you to use this sample letter or write your own in support of SB 107. After sending a letter, please share your support via your social media, emails, calls, and zoom meetings as well!

**Please submit your letter of support now!**

**Letters of support should be sent before 12pm on March 2, 2021**

**Please email letters to** [**Nune.Garipian@sen.ca.gov**](mailto:Nune.Garipian@sen.ca.gov)**;** [**jared@nourishca.org**](mailto:jared@nourishca.org)

**or**

**submit directly through the State’s online Advocate Portal for Legislative Position Letters:**

[**https://calegislation.lc.ca.gov/Advocates/**](https://calegislation.lc.ca.gov/Advocates/)

**\*Note: You will need to create an account for yourself/your organization to upload letters through the portal.**

**Organizations: please be sure to submit your letter on letterhead.**

**Individuals: please be sure to include your mailing address in your letter.**

**Questions?** Contact Jared Call at 323.401.4972 or [jared@nourishca.org](mailto:jared@nourishca.org)

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**[PLACE ON YOUR ORGANIZATION’S LETTERHEAD]**

**[Date]**

The Honorable Melissa Hurtado

Chair, Senate Human Services Committee

State Capitol, Room 3070

Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Support for SB 107 (Wiener): CalFresh—Simpler for Seniors**

Dear Chairperson Hurtado,

**[I am/Name of your organization is]** writing in support of SB 107 (Wiener), which would simplify the CalFresh application for many older adults and people with disabilities, and ensure all applicants and participants can complete the application and recertification interview processes by phone, including the required client signature.

COVID-19 is exacerbating already high levels of hunger and hardship, particularly among older adults and people with disabilities. Despite federal and state interventions, the most recent data show that overall food insecurity has spiked to more than 25 percent of California households – [that’s some 10 million people](https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/state-food-insecurity.html), and 2.5 times higher than [before the COVID-19 crisis began](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/99282/err-275.pdf?v=1730.7). As a proven positive public health intervention and powerful economic stabilizer, CalFresh has a critical dual role to play in California’s immediate COVID-19 response and long-term recovery efforts. Yet nearly [30 percent of eligible Californians miss out](https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_california.pdf) on CalFresh and only 19 percent of eligible older Californians (age 60 or over) are enrolled. In fact, [California ranks last in the nation](https://frac.org/maps/seniors/senior-snap-rates.html) when it comes to enrolling eligible older adults in CalFresh (or SNAP, as it is known federally). In order to better connect older adults with ongoing federal food assistance, it is critical that we exercise every available option to simplify access to CalFresh.

The current CalFresh application — the CF 285 — is a complex, 18-page document. It can be challenging and intimidating for anyone. Particularly for older adults and persons with physical or developmental disabilities, it can be a major barrier to participation. Though we applaud the success of online application portals like GetCalFresh.org, we also consistently hear from stakeholders that older adults want the option of completing a paper application. Many low-income older adults lack reliable internet access and/or do not feel comfortable sharing personal information online.

With the COVID-19 crisis worsening hunger and hardship across the state, we urgently need to implement all effective and efficient strategies that maximize the reach of our most powerful anti-hunger program. That starts with addressing the major participation gap among older Californians. Simplified CalFresh enrollment is a proven successful strategy. SB 107 would enact recommendations in the state’s [Master Plan for Aging](https://mpa.aging.ca.gov/Goals/5), specifically Goal 5 (Affordable Aging), Strategy C (Protection from Hunger and Poverty), Initiative 131: “Continue to streamline older and disabled adult enrollment, renewal, and online shopping in CalFresh, as allowable.”

SB 107 would further improve access to CalFresh by ensuring that all applicants and participants can complete the application and reporting processes by phone, including the required client signature. Pandemic conditions have forced the two-thirds of California counties without telephonic/electronic signature capacity to implement emergency workarounds to provide remote services to communities facing unprecedented need. Those workarounds are possible due to expanded flexibility provided through temporary federal waivers, now being approved by [USDA Food and Nutrition Service on a temporary, month-by-month basis](https://cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACWDL/2021/ACWDL%20CalFresh%20Waiver%20Extension%20February%202021.pdf).

While telephonic/electronic signature is a critically important capacity for county welfare departments during COVID-19, this has been a long-standing need for clients with busy, unpredictable schedules and those without reliable internet access. The recent expansion of CalFresh eligibility to SSI recipients was facilitated by a multi-stakeholder process with counties, CDSS and advocates. That process produced concrete recommendations to improve county business processes to better serve the older adult and disabled populations. The [number one recommendation](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CalFresh%20SSI%20Cash-Out/SSI%20Cash-Out%20Implementation%20Framework-Final%20(002)%20Accessible%20312019.pdf?ver=2019-03-04-145752-150) was to allow for telephonic/electronic signature.

**[If you would like to, insert your own reason(s) for supporting SB 107 here.]**

Implementing a user-centered, simplified CalFresh application and ensuring full telephonic access are critical steps to address hunger in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. We cannot delay action any longer. Now is the time to make permanent improvements to simplify CalFresh access and close the participation gap. No one should go hungry in the great state of California, and older adult and disabled households deserve to live with dignity, free from hunger. It is our collective responsibility to remove long-standing barriers to CalFresh, the most powerful anti-hunger tool at our disposal.

For these reasons, we strongly support SB 107 and urge your ‘aye’ vote.

Sincerely,

**[Your name and title]**

**[Your organization, if applicable]**

cc: Senator Scott Wiener (SD-11)

Jared Call, Nourish California (sponsor)

Blanca E. Castro-Paszinski, AARP California (co-sponsor)

Andrew Cheyne, California Association of Food Banks (co-sponsor)

Meg Davidson, San Francisco-Marin Food Bank (co-sponsor)