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ASSOCIATION OF  
FOOD BANKS



February 22, 2021

The Honorable Scott Wiener  
Senator, 11<sup>th</sup> Senate District  
State Capitol, Room 5100  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Wiener:

Nourish California, San Francisco-Marín Food Bank, AARP California, and the California Association of Food Banks are proud to co-sponsor SB 107, which will simplify access to CalFresh for older adults, people with disabilities, and working families. We thank you for your leadership in working to improve low-income Californians' access to sufficient, affordable, nutritious food. SB 107 would accomplish this by simplifying the CalFresh application for many older adults and people with disabilities, and by ensuring 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](#), and 2.5 times higher than [before the COVID-19 crisis began](#). As a proven positive public health intervention and a 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](#) on CalFresh and only 19 percent of eligible older Californians (age 60 or over) are enrolled. In fact, [California ranks last in the nation](#) 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, which can be challenging and intimidating for anyone. This is particularly true for older adults and persons with physical or developmental disabilities, which means it can be a major barrier to their participation in the program. Though we applaud the success of online application portals like



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GetCalFresh.org, we also consistently hear from stakeholders that older adults want the option of completing a paper application. Moreover, 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](#), 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](#).

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 as well as 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](#) was to allow for telephonic/electronic signature.

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 adults and disabled Californians deserve to live with dignity, free from hunger. It is our collective responsibility to remove long-standing barriers to CalFresh, the most powerful



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anti-hunger tool at our disposal. We thank you for your leadership on SB 107, and we strongly support this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jared Call".

Jared Call  
Senior Advocate  
Nourish California

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Cheyne".

Andrew Cheyne  
Director of Government Affairs,  
California Association of Food Banks

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy C. McPherson".

Nancy McPherson  
California State Director  
AARP

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Meg Davidson".

Meg Davidson  
Director of Policy & Advocacy,  
San Francisco-Marín Food Bank