

April 26, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee 3
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee 1
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: “Food for All” Budget Investment Request to Modernize the California Food Assistance Program

Dear Budget Leaders:

Nourish California, California Immigrant Policy Center, and the undersigned organizations write on behalf of low-income immigrant Californians to improve their access to food assistance that will help them afford the nutritious food they need. We respectfully request an investment in the 2021-2022 Budget Act to create an equitable state food assistance system that does not discriminate on the basis of immigration status.

The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating hunger and hardship for many Californians, particularly our immigrant communities. For immigrant workers, this pandemic has significantly affected their health, security, and income resulting in high unemployment rates in industries like hospitality and food service¹. At the same time immigrants comprise 36 percent of California’s essential workforce², including over 1.2 million undocumented Californians working frontline jobs — risking COVID-19 exposure for low wages. Despite their many contributions, immigrants are explicitly and unjustly denied access to our most effective anti-hunger programs: CalFresh and the state-funded California Food Assistance Program. This systemic discrimination exacerbates racial disparities in health and wealth, and hinders California’s ability to weather this and future recessions.

¹ <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/californias-unemployment-remains-high/>

² <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2311502420952752>

California established the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) in response to 1996 federal welfare reform that ended SNAP eligibility for many documented immigrants, but it wasn't made fully inclusive. Current laws exclude undocumented immigrants, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and certain visa holders from federal SNAP/CalFresh and CFAP eligibility. Today, CFAP serves about 38,000 "qualified immigrants" who lost federal SNAP eligibility, but many more could be reached if we modernize the program to accurately reflect the needs and makeup of California's immigrant population.³ California has the power to make CFAP more inclusive and be a model for the rest of the nation.

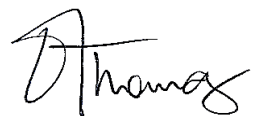
In order to effectively address increasing food insecurity, reduce poverty and homelessness, and support California's recovery from the impact of COVID-19, it is critical that our state modernize CFAP and bring equity to our state's safety net. California has a longstanding history of enacting inclusive policies and can end the unjust exclusion of immigrants. Until all California residents can access food assistance if and when they need it, our institutions will not fully reflect the state's values of equity and inclusion.

For these reasons, we urgently request an ongoing budget investment to modernize the California Food Assistance Program to provide state-funded nutrition benefits to any Californian ineligible for CalFresh solely due to their immigration status. Ensuring immigrant Californians are treated equitably and have sufficient food are important steps toward addressing hunger that worsens amid the COVID-19 crisis. Now is the time for California to champion bold policies and put forth a different vision for our nation, one where all Californians — regardless of immigration status — have the food they need.

If you have any questions please contact Jared Call, Nourish California at jared@nourishca.org.
Sincerely,



Jared Call
Senior Advocate
Nourish California



Orville Thomas
Government Affairs Director
California Immigrant Policy Center

³ <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/research-and-data/calfresh-data-tables/dfa256>



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