

May 12, 2022

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 Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee 1
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Kevin McCarty
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee 2
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable John Laird
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee 1
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: “Food with Care” Budget Request—Free Nutritious Meals for All Children in Preschool and Child Care

Dear Budget Leaders:

On behalf of Nourish California, CACFP Roundtable, and the undersigned organizations, we write to urge you to build upon the investments in child nutrition that were enacted in the 2021-22 state budget. Thanks to your vision and leadership, California recently became the first state in the nation to expand free meals to all K-12 students. It's time to make a similar investment in our youngest learners.

The pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of and widened the gaps in our child care system, while simultaneously exacerbating food insecurity among households with young children. Child care providers have had to scramble to feed even hungrier kids, all while struggling with higher food costs, limited supplies, inconsistent enrollment, and inadequate support from the state.

The federal child care meal program brought more than 81 million breakfasts and lunches to kids in child care in 2019. However, underlying federal rules for the federal child care meal program don't reflect California's true level of poverty—keeping many children from accessing nutritious, affordable meals. For example, a family of four must make less than \$34,060 a year in order for a child care center to serve a free meal.

The partial reimbursements provided by the federal child care meal program are a significant resource for child care providers. Yet, federal rules do not take into account California's high cost of living. Current rates of reimbursement are inadequate to cover operating costs for child care. Each year California's high cost of living forces child care providers to absorb tens of millions of dollars in costs for meals served to children who don't qualify for free meals, but who need them all the same.

The harm to children and the burden on providers is compounded by state policies that financially penalize child care providers for feeding younger children. Existing statute creates a pay penalty that limits providers to only 75 percent of the state reimbursement for meals served. The pay penalty is the result of a racist legacy of child care laws—still in place today—that underpays labor historically performed by Black, Latina, and immigrant women.

The federal child care meal program, with adequate funding and support, has the power to fill the gap in access to healthy meals in child care while supporting the financial stability of the child care workforce.

Parents need child care so they can go to work. Child care providers need financial stability to keep their doors open and serve children meals. This small investment works threefold as it ensures young children are served meals in child care, buoys the child care workforce, and enables parents to go back to work.

According to a recent Pew Research study, nearly half of workers with a child under 18 (48 percent), said “child care issues were a reason they quit a job.” This has kept women's participation in the labor force below the levels it was at pre-pandemic.¹

¹ Pew Research Center, March 2022, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/>

We, therefore respectfully request an ongoing investment of \$70 million and a \$15 million one-time investment to:

- Enable all child care providers to qualify for reimbursements equivalent to the highest federal rate for meals served in the federal child care meal program;
- Finally eliminate the child care meal pay penalty; and
- Make strategic investments to support pandemic recovery through start-up and expansion grants (one-time funding).

Nutrition intervention in early childhood is a proven strategy for improving lifelong health, education, and general well-being of children in households with low income. This small investment will pay large dividends by putting hundreds of thousands of young children on a better path to a brighter future. At the same time, the state must ensure that we adequately support the financial stability of our essential child care workforce.

We appreciate your consideration. Please don't hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or wish to discuss our request.

Sincerely,



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Samantha Marshall, Director of Programs & Policy
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Cc: Senator Josh Becker (SD-13)

Nichole Munoz-Murillo, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Jennifer Hernandez, Department of Social Services
Gabrielle Santoro, Department of Finance

Organizational Sign-Ons

Nourish California (Cosponsor)
CACFP Roundtable (Cosponsor)
California Association of Food Banks

California Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations
California Family Child Care Network
California Food and Farming Network
Catalyst Community
CocoKids
Community Action Partnership of Orange County
Community Health Councils
Family Resource & Referral Center
GLIDE
Global Refugee Awareness Healing Center
Head Start California
Kidango
Learning Care Group
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
Mission Readiness: Council for a Strong America
Options for Learning
Pesticide Action Network
San Diego Hunger Coalition
San Francisco-Marin Food Bank
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County
Second Harvest Food Bank of Silicon Valley
Strong America and Mission: Readiness
United Ways of California
The Way Resource Center



LOS ANGELES REGIONAL



Fighting Hunger. Giving Hope.





CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF FOOD BANKS



UNLOCKING THE PROMISE OF EVERY CHILD



Head Start CALIFORNIA

CONNECTING | ENGAGING | ADVOCATING for our highest needs children



United Ways of California



MISSION: READINESS COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA

CALIFORNIA



Family Resource & Referral Center

We Care About Children and Families



Community Health Councils

