



March 20, 2023

The Honorable Robert Rivas
Chair, Assembly Agriculture Committee
1020 N Street, Room 362
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for AB 605 (Arambula)—CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits Expansion

Dear Chairperson Rivas,

Nourish California writes as cosponsor and in strong support of AB 605 (Arambula), which would expand the number and geographic diversity of retailers offering fruit and vegetable supplemental benefits to CalFresh participants. Thank you for your leadership to ensure our state's nutrition safety net is adequate and equitable.

SNAP emergency allotments, additional benefits offered during the COVID-19 pandemic, are ending this March. California families will have fewer benefits to purchase food and are likely to face higher rates of hunger. The state must explore every way to cushion the blow to prevent further spikes in hunger and hardship including expanding the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits program.

This February, the California Department of Social Services went live with the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Program¹, which provides CalFresh households with up to \$60/month in additional food assistance when they buy California-grown fresh fruits and vegetables with their EBT cards. Because this program is integrated into the state's EBT system, it is poised to scale at

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<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/13/Press%20Releases/2023/CDSS-News-release-California-Fruit-Veg-EBT-Pilot-Project.pdf>

more retail locations and reach many more people quickly – and could help blunt some of the pain of the benefits cliff.

In addition to helping reduce hunger, Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits also benefit California farmers who grow the vast majority of produce sold in grocery stores (and all the produce sold at certified California farmers' markets).

Californians with low income are food insecure and can't make ends meet.

- As of early 2022, one of every ten adults in California report that they struggle to consistently put enough food on their table.² This very high rate of food insecurity exists even with the CalFresh program providing food assistance to between 4-5 million Californians.³
- According to a recent statewide survey, three in four Californians with low or moderate income worried about running out of food in the past year. And three in five actually did run out of food.⁴
- Research demonstrates that current CalFresh benefits alone do not provide enough money for families to meet the USDA's nutrition and dietary guidelines for fruits and vegetables.⁵
- Federal SNAP emergency allotments have provided, in total, \$500 million dollars in food assistance each month to Californians. That translates into an average drop in CalFresh benefits of roughly \$200/month per household⁶.
- CalFresh households' purchasing patterns often don't reflect the foods they need, want, or find culturally appropriate. Shopping decisions are shaped mostly by high prices and limited access, which restricts their choices.⁷

² US Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, "Food Scarcity - Week 41 (December 29, 2021 – January 10, 2022)":https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/hhp/#/?measures=FOODSCARCE&periodSelector=41&s_state=0000

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³ CalFresh Data Dashboard, CalFresh Persons - Monthly Participation (as of Nov 2021):

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/data-portal/research-and-data/calfresh-data-dashboard>

⁴ Nourish California and Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3), 2021, available at <https://nourishca.org/event/food-hardship-hope-for-change/>

⁵ Mulik, Kranti et al., "The Affordability of MyPlate: An Analysis of SNAP Benefits and the Actual Cost of Eating According to the Dietary Guidelines", *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Vol. 49, Issue 8 (September 2017), 623 – 631.

⁶ Kuang, Jeanne. "No Light at the Other End": Impending Loss of Pandemic CalFresh Boosts Could Trigger Hunger Spike." *CalMatters*, February 9, 2023.

<https://calmatters.org/california-divide/2023/02/calfresh-emergency-allotments-ending/>.

⁷ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "More Adequate SNAP Benefits Would Help Millions of Participants Better Afford Food," July 2021:

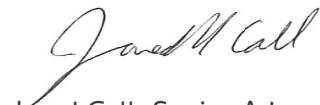
<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-adequate-snap-benefits-would-help-millions-of-participants-better>

- Among Californians with low income, 29 percent report that they can only sometimes find affordable fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood and 3 percent report they never can.⁸

Expanding CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits to be available to hundreds of thousands of households across the state will, in the short-term, help families afford the foods they need to stay healthy and help alleviate some of the economic strain they are facing with SNAP emergency allotments ending. In the long-term, it will position the program to become permanently available to CalFresh families throughout California. It is a “win-win-win” that reduces hunger, improves public health, and boosts California’s agricultural economy.

For these reasons, we strongly support AB 605, and urge your ‘aye’ vote to boost CalFresh benefits while supporting a strong California agricultural economy.

Sincerely,



Jared Call, Senior Advocate

Nourish California

⁸ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2015 California Health Interview Survey: <http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/chis/Pages/default.aspx>. Low-income defined as households up to 200% of the federal poverty level.

