



March 3, 2025

The Honorable Scott Wiener
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
California State Senate
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: “Food for All” Budget Request to Bring Equitable Access to the California Food Assistance Program

Dear Senator Wiener and Assemblymember Gabriel,

Nourish California and the California Immigrant Policy Center write on behalf of California immigrants with low incomes, urging you to ensure equitable access to the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) for all immigrants, regardless of immigration status. We are grateful for your actions in the 2024-25 State Budget to protect California’s commitment to end the exclusion of income-eligible immigrants ages 55 and older from accessing food assistance through CFAP. **While this budget allocation is a step towards an equitable state food safety net, we respectfully request a full investment to provide access to CFAP for income-eligible Californians ages 0-54, regardless of immigration status.**

California’s social safety net protects families during times of economic hardship – and in the wake of natural disasters like fires and storms – but many immigrants in California are unjustly excluded. Worsening economic hardship has significantly affected immigrants’ health, security, and incomes, resulting in high rates of unemployment and poverty.¹ Building on food insecurity findings published in partnership with the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research,^{2,3} recent research published by Nourish California, the California Immigrant Policy Center, and in partnership with Public Policy Institute of California⁴ highlighted troubling findings about the level of poverty and hardship faced by undocumented Californians. Among those findings:

¹ <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/undocumented-mixed-status-families-are-blocked-from-food-support/>

² <https://nourishca.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Food4All-FoodInsecurityBrief-April2022.pdf>

³ <https://caimmigrant.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2023-Food4All-snapshot-4.pdf>

⁴ <https://nourishca.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-Food4All-infographic.pdf>

- **Six in ten** (sixty-four percent) of non-citizens without legal permanent resident status (described throughout these key findings as “undocumented immigrants”) of all ages are living in or near poverty, compared to thirty-five percent statewide.
- **Forty-one percent** of undocumented children and young adults ages 0-26 in California are living in poverty, which is twice the rate of the statewide average.
- Rates of food insecurity are especially acute for children. **Sixty four percent** of undocumented children are affected by food insecurity.
- Nearly **500,000** undocumented adults (18 years and older) live in households struggling with food insecurity. **The majority of these adults are 27-49 years old.**

Despite the clear need for critical services to meet basic needs, immigrants are explicitly and unjustly denied access to our most effective anti-poverty program: CalFresh and its state-funded counterpart, CFAP. In early 2023, CalFresh alone kept 1.1 million Californians out of poverty.⁵ This exclusion only worsens racial disparities in health and wealth and hinders California’s ability to weather economic downturns.

The federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 severely restricted immigrants’ access to public benefits, including nutrition assistance through SNAP. In response, California established CFAP in 1997 to reach some immigrants who lost eligibility, but many people are still shut out of food assistance. Undocumented immigrants, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and certain visa holders remain ineligible for CFAP due to their immigration status. Today, CFAP currently serves approximately 55,000 “qualified immigrants” who lost federal SNAP eligibility following the 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA).⁶ Still, the program could reach many more if expanded to accurately reflect the needs and makeup of California’s immigrant population. California has the power to make CFAP more inclusive and a model for the rest of the nation.

California is set to be the first state in the nation to expand eligibility to food assistance to residents ages 55 and older, regardless of immigration status. According to a January 2025 report from the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO), between 90,000 and 130,000 California residents ages 55 and older will be eligible under the implementation of the CFAP expansion beginning October 1, 2027.

⁵ <https://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/>

⁶ <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/research-and-data/calfresh-data-tables/cf296>

We are requesting that the Legislature reallocate \$38 million for program development, outreach, and automation for the CFAP expansion to ages 55+ from FY 2024-25 to FY 2025-26 (as stated in the first bullet point below). We anticipate the Legislature will honor their commitment to expanding CFAP eligibility to Californians ages 55 and older, regardless of immigration status, which will cost⁷:

- \$38 million (GF) for continued program development, outreach, and automation **reallocated** from FY 2024-25 to FY 2025-26 (note that this reallocation would have a net neutral cost in the General Fund)
- \$89.6 million (GF) in FY 2027-28 for 9 months of benefits (start date is Oct 1, 2027)
- \$132 million (GF) in FY 2028-29 for 12 months of benefits and ongoing

The same LAO report estimates that between 380,000 and 550,000 additional California residents aged 0 to 54 would be eligible for CFAP if immigration status was removed as a barrier to accessing benefits. The funding request below⁷ is based on the expansion of CFAP to ages 0-54 with an estimated take-up rate of 50 percent, aligned with take-up rates from relevant programs within the range proposed by the LAO, and average per person benefit adjusted for projected inflation:

- No additional funding in FY 2025-26 for continued program development, automation, and outreach, seeing that the funds committed to the CFAP expansion for ages 55 and older will be used for an expansion to all age groups.
- \$30 million (GF) for additional program development and outreach in FY 2026-27 and no additional funding in FY 2026-27 for automation seeing that the funds committed to the CFAP expansion for ages 55 and older will be used for an expansion to all age groups
- \$378.7 million (GF) in FY 2027-28 for 9 months of benefits (start date is Oct 1, 2027) + \$20 (GF) million for outreach
- \$558 million (GF) for 12 months of benefits in FY 2028-29 and ongoing

Expanding eligibility to all ages poses a unique opportunity to reduce administrative burden and save costs if the Legislature and Governor decide to include all ages in the expansion. This is because automation and program development for the existing expansion is already underway. At this stage in the implementation timeline, preparing the expansion to all ages would be significantly more cost-effective and efficient for the administrative workload. For example, outreach has not yet begun, and could be redirected to focus on all ages at once, rather than doing outreach several times with

⁷ These costs reflect fiscal and population estimates produced by the Legislative Analyst's Office in January 2025, assuming a 50% take up rate and adjusted for projected inflation.

an incremental, phased-in approach (i.e. once for the 55+ population, and again for another age group).

To effectively address increasing food insecurity, reduce poverty, and mitigate the burden of high cost of food due to rapidly rising inflation, our state must remove historic, xenophobic exclusions from CFAP for California immigrants of all ages. Now more than ever, California must build on its longstanding history of enacting inclusive policies to end the unjust exclusion of immigrants from our state's food assistance programs. 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.

We extend our gratitude to the Legislature and Governor Newsom for taking the first steps toward ending the unjust immigrant exclusion in CalFresh in the 2021-22 State Budget by including funding for CFAP automation and system readiness.^{8,9} We are also grateful for the action to build on this investment in the 2022-23 State Budget by expanding CFAP benefits to income-eligible California immigrants ages 55 and older, regardless of immigration status, and establishing a timeline for implementation in the 2023-2024 State Budget. Despite fiscal challenges, the 2024-2025 State Budget protected this expansion and delayed its implementation date to October 1, 2027. However, the need for a complete expansion remains urgent as immigrant communities face increased fear, exclusion, and reduction in services. Now is the time to bring equity to our food safety net and remove racist and xenophobic policies.

For these reasons, we request a budget reallocation of \$38 million (GF) from FY 2024-25 to FY 2025-26, \$30 million (GF) in 2026-27, \$398.7 million in FY 2027-28, and \$558 million in FY 2028-29 and ongoing to build on the allocations made in prior state budgets by ensuring equitable access to CFAP for California immigrants of all ages currently ineligible for CalFresh solely due to their immigration status.

If you have any questions, please contact Jackie Mendelson at Nourish California, jackie@nourishca.org and Benyamin Chao at the California Immigrant Policy Center, bchao@caimmigrant.org.

Sincerely,
The Food4All Coalition

⁸ https://sbud.senate.ca.gov/sites/sbud.senate.ca.gov/files/Final_Actions_Report_2021.pdf

⁹ [Final Floor Report of the 2021-22 Budget](#)



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Berkeley Food Institute
Berkeley Food Network
Border Angels
Bread for the World
Buen Vecino
California Association of Food Banks
California Black Health Network
California Food + Farming Network
California Nurses for Environmental Health and Justice
California Immigrant Policy Center
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation Advocates for Justice
California WIC Association
Canal Alliance
Center for Food Safety
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Central Valley Immigrant Integration Collaborative (CVIIC)
Ceres Community Project
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
CocoKids

Community Action Marin
Community Action Partnership
Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County (CCALAC)
Community Services Unlimited, Inc.
Cultiva de Salud
Dietitian of the Desert
Education & Leadership Foundation
EPIC
Family Connections Centers
Farmworker Care Coalition
FEAST
Feeding San Diego
Food Bank of Contra Costa & Solano
Food for People
Food Share Ventura County
Foodlink
Friends of the Earth
Gender Justice Los Angeles
GLIDE
GRACE & End Child Poverty California
Healthy Kids Happy Faces
Hunger Action Los Angeles
Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice (ICIJ)
Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC)
Jewish Family Service
Jewish Family Services LA
Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California (JPAC)
Justice in Aging
Kidango
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California (LCHC)
Latino Community Foundation
Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
Lutheran Office of Public Policy - California
Mandela Partners
Marin Food Policy Council

Maternal and Child Health Access
Mi Familia Vota
Mission Food Hub
Mission Neighborhood Health Center
Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP)
Monterey Bay Central Labor Council
Movimiento Indígena Migrante (Centro del Pueblo)
National Health Foundation
No Kid Hungry
Nourish California
Oasis Legal Services
OC Rapid Response Network
ÓRALE: Organizing Rooted in Abolition Liberation and Empowerment
Orange County Equality Coalition
Pesticide Action Network
Prevention Institute
Public Health Advocates
Rainbow Beginnings
Red Jen
Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services
Safe & Sound
San Diego Hunger Coalition
San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium
San Luis Obispo Food Bank
Santa Barbara County Food Bank
Second Harvest Food Bank Orange County
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley
SF Community Clinic Consortium
SF Marin Food Bank
South Asian Network
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
St. John's Community Health
Street Level Health Project
The Children's Partnership
The Gubbio Project
The OMI Cultural Participation Project
The Women's Building

Universidad Popular
Urban & Environmental Policy Institute of Occidental College
Valley Oak Children's Services
Visión y Compromiso
Western Center on Law & Poverty
Westside Food Bank
What We All Deserve
Women Organizing Resources, Knowledge, + Services (WORKS)
Yolo Food Bank