



February 2, 2026

The Honorable John Laird
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 Laird and Assemblymember Gabriel,

Nourish California and the California Immigrant Policy Center urge 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 2025-26 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 now face a dramatically altered landscape due to harmful federal actions. In light of historic cuts to immigrant eligibility to CalFresh resulting from HR 1, we respectfully request a full investment to restore food access for newly excluded populations; to protect your commitment to providing access to CFAP for income-eligible Californians ages 55 and older, regardless of immigration status; and expand this access to Californians of all ages.**

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 Research published by Nourish California, the California Immigrant Policy Center, and in partnership with Public Policy Institute of California² and UCLA Center for Health Policy Research^{3,4} highlighted troubling findings about the level of poverty, hardship, and food insecurity faced by undocumented Californians.

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

² <https://nourishca.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-Food4All-infographic.pdf>

³ <https://nourishca.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Food4All-FoodInsecurityBrief-April2022.pdf>

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

Among those findings:

- **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 2023, CalFresh alone kept 856,000 Californians out of poverty.⁵ Exclusions based on immigration status only worsen racial disparities in health and wealth and hinder California’s ability to weather economic downturns.

The enactment of H.R. 1 creates new exclusions for many previously eligible categories of lawfully present immigrants from CalFresh, including refugees, asylees, trafficking survivors, survivors of domestic violence with pending petitions, and individuals granted humanitarian parole. According to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), these changes currently effective April 1, 2026⁶ will take CalFresh benefits away from nearly 74,000 Californians and result in the loss of \$133 million in federal funding annually. These cuts will also reduce benefits for mixed-status households that include U.S. citizens.

Because these 74,000 Californians are not currently eligible for CFAP under existing statute and systems design, the state now faces a critical and time-sensitive need to remove immigration-based exclusions from CFAP. Doing so would allow California to immediately mitigate federal harm, protect mixed-status families, and maintain continuity of benefits for communities facing displacement, violence, or persecution.

The federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (PRWORA) 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,

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

⁶ [All County Letter \(ACL\) 25-92 | California Department of Social Services](#)

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.”⁷ Building upon the legacy of this program, modernizing CFAP to reflect the demographic and economic realities of California’s immigrant population is both feasible and urgently needed. Given the newly excluded populations under H.R. 1, building a program centered on inclusion and benefit restoration as soon as possible is essential to preventing hunger for tens of thousands of Californians.

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.

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:

- \$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 below⁸ 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:

- \$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

Note: The above CFAP monthly benefit amounts are based on pre-H.R. 1 exclusion data and do not include projected changes in eligibility or costs.

Building on this baseline, we urge the state to take immediate steps to ensure that benefits for this newly excluded population are restored as quickly as administratively

⁷ <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/research-and-data/california-data-tables/cf296>

⁸ 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.

possible. This includes directing the appropriate agencies to assess and accelerate all necessary automation, systems updates, and operational readiness efforts so that California can begin issuing benefits even sooner than the established October 1, 2027 implementation date. To meet the urgency of this moment, we also request that the Legislature appropriate the estimated \$133 million needed to cover the benefits gap for the estimated 74,000 Californians who will lose CalFresh due to H.R. 1 as soon as possible, no later than October 1, 2027. Restoring food assistance for this population will prevent new hardship while the state prepares for its first age-based expansion of CFAP.

Expanding eligibility to all ages poses a unique opportunity to reduce administrative burden and save costs if the Legislature and Governor step up and decide to include all ages in the expansion. This is because automation and program development for the existing expansion are 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 is restarting in early 2026 and could be redirected to focus on all ages at once, rather than doing outreach several times with an incremental, phased-in approach (i.e., once for the 55+ population and again for another age group).

Given the compounding effects of inflation, rising food prices, and the sudden loss of federal nutrition assistance for tens of thousands of Californians under H.R. 1, the state must act quickly and decisively. Expanding CFAP to all regardless of age or immigration status is the most effective, immediate, and scalable tool available to protect Californians from hunger and to counteract discriminatory federal policy. Until everyone who calls California home 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.^{9,10} 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.

We also thank the Legislature and Governor for protecting the expansion's implementation date from proposed trigger-on language in the 2025-2026 State Budget. Still, the urgency of this moment demands further action. With 74,000

⁹ https://sbud.senate.ca.gov/sites/sbud.senate.ca.gov/files/Final_Actions_Report_2021.pdf

¹⁰ [Final Floor Report of the 2021-22 Budget](#)

Californians imminently losing CalFresh and long-excluded communities facing worsening hardship and hunger, California must finish the job and remove all immigration-based exclusions from CFAP.

For these reasons, we request a budget investment \$398.7 million in FY 2027-28, and \$558 million in FY 2028-29 and ongoing to protect and expand 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. We also urge the legislature to invest an additional \$133 million (GF) to restore benefits that an estimated 74,000 Californians will lose due to H.R. 1 and perform necessary systems updates and automation as soon as possible, no later than October 1, 2027.

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

Sincerely,
Food4All Cosponsors



Jackie Mendelson
Policy Advocate
Nourish California



Benjamin Chao
Health & Public Benefits Policy Manager
California Immigrant Policy Center