

June 20, 2023

The Honorable Dr. Corey Jackson
Chair, Human Services Committee
1020 N Street, Room 124
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Jackson,

On behalf of the San Diego Hunger Coalition, I am writing in **SUPPORT of Senate Bill 600 (Menjivar) – CalFresh Minimum Benefit Adequacy Act of 2023**. At a time when CalFresh recipients are facing the dual burden of elevated food costs and a looming hunger cliff, it is critical that the state does everything it can to boost CalFresh benefits, particularly for those who receive meager and wholly inadequate allotments below \$50 per month.

Despite the record high enrollment in CalFresh and other hunger relief programs in San Diego County, individuals and families throughout our region continued to struggle as inflation outpaced increases in wages or fixed income. In September 2022, the Consumer Price Index reported an 8.2% increase in prices, including a 13% increase in food at home and a 26% increase in gasolineⁱ, while wages only grew by 6.6% in the same quarterⁱⁱ. Of note, these increases were in addition to a nearly 20% increase from 2019 to 2022 in the average cost of a meal in the United States, according to the USDA's monthly Cost of Food reports.ⁱⁱⁱ The need for food assistance among nutrition insecure households was therefore higher in September 2022 as these economic trends further reduced their purchasing power. The nutrition security rate is expected to increase in the coming months as a CalFresh Emergency allotments, which provided an estimated 10 million meals in September, expired in March 2023

Statewide, more than five million Californians will experience a devastating cut to their CalFresh benefits as federally funded Emergency Allotments end in March 2023. The average CalFresh household will lose \$200 per month. Many households, such as older adults living alone, will see their benefits slashed from \$281 to the federally-set minimum allotment of \$23 per month. California can — and should — join several other states that have already taken this action to help mitigate poverty and food insecurity.

Not only is this critical to mitigate the looming hunger cliff, but it will bring significant economic return throughout our vital food economy. Every \$1 in CalFresh benefits generates as much as \$1.80 in GDP during an economic downturn, creating jobs for our farmers, transportation, grocery, and other sectors. Additionally, an investment in CalFresh is linked to healthcare cost savings since more adequate benefits improve food security, nutrition, and health. Investing in SB 600 creates an economic boost while putting money in people's pockets so that they can feed themselves and their families.

It is for these reasons San Diego Hunger Coalition is pleased to SUPPORT SB 600.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anahid Brakke".

Anahid Brakke
President & CEO



ⁱ Data obtained from the BLS at https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/consumerpriceindex_sandiego.htm.

ⁱⁱ Data obtained from the BLS at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cewqtr.t01.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Calculated from the monthly USDA food plan costs. Data obtained from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/usda-food-plans-cost-food-reports-monthly-reports>.