[ON YOUR LETTERHEAD]

RE: Budget Augmentation to Support Historic End of SSI Cash-Out

To: The Board of Supervisors of xx County

After 44 years, SSI recipients in California are finally eligible for SNAP benefits.[[1]](#footnote-1) This policy change will positively impact the xx SSI[[2]](#footnote-2) recipients currently living in xx County who are struggling to stay housed and fed. Across counties, it will bring hundreds of millions of new federal dollars to California. But this will only happen if we can actually enroll SSI recipients onto CalFresh – the process will not be automatic. **We are writing to the Board of Supervisors today to request your financial and technological assistance in making sure that xx County signs up as many SSI recipients for CalFresh as possible.**

Supplemental Security Income, or ‘SSI’, is a federally funded program that provides a modest monthly benefit to low-income people who are 65 or older, blind, or disabled.[[3]](#footnote-3) In California, the SSI payment is augmented by a State Supplementary Payment, or ‘SSP,’ which brings the maximum monthly benefit for an individual living alone to $910.74[[4]](#footnote-4) – an amount that forces many low-income seniors and people with disabilities to live in poverty. Until now, California remained to be the only state in the country that barred SSI recipients from CalFresh eligibility.[[5]](#footnote-5) This has exacerbated hunger and poverty across the state for this population, leading many SSI recipients to rely on local food banks, pantries and hot meal sites for their daily nutrition.

The decision to repeal SSI cash-out becomes effective between June 1, 2019 and August 1, 2019. When SSI recipients become eligible we are anticipating a surge of applications into county offices all across California. The state Department of Social Services (DSS), the counties and advocates for the poor have been working since June to get prepared. Our goal is to sign up as many as 500,000 new CalFresh recipients across the state while minimizing impacts on counties and applicants.

Under the direction of DSS, all parties worked together to develop a consensus list of tools that we collectively believe can be implemented by next summer and which hold the greatest promise for making the application process as smooth as possible. By the end of 2018 counties will be getting funding from DSS to make improvements to their CalFresh business processes. This funding can be flexibly spent by counties to increase call center capacity, add features to on line application portals, expand use of application assisters, improve customer experience at county offices or to expand staffing to handle the anticipated surge of applications.

**The funding from the state, however, will not be able to make every improvement to the CalFresh application process that we all desire. We are writing to you today to ask the Board to consider augmenting the funding that you receive from the state to improve the CalFresh application experience.** We strongly encourage the Board to meet with the leadership of your human service agency and with local advocates to identify key investments that could be made by counties that supplement state funding. **These investments are not just one time improvements that only benefit SSI recipients but are system changes that will benefit the county and CalFresh households for decades to come.**

County investments in expanding access to CalFresh will produce significant, long-term returns on investment. If our County can plan for an effective and seamless policy change next summer, our whole community will benefit: [Choose any/all of these reasons, or write your own]

* Access to CalFresh reduces healthcare spending, improves health and allows low-income seniors to age in place with dignity.[[6]](#footnote-6)
* A relatively inexpensive investment will make a noticeable difference for those struggling to stay housed. An investment of just $500,000 could generate many times more than that in ongoing CalFresh benefits to our county.
* Research shows that every $1 in CalFresh benefits generates $1.79 in economic activity, as the dollars are spent immediately and locally which supports retailers, food producers, and transportation networks alike.[[7]](#footnote-7) Last year alone, xx County brought in $xx[[8]](#footnote-8) in 100% federally funded benefits.
* [ONLY FOR BIG COUNTIES]: In addition, every $1 billion in benefits generates as many as 14,000 jobs in areas with heavy food economies like California.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The surge in newly eligible CalFresh population, combined with administering Supplemental Nutrition Benefits and Transitional Nutrition Benefits for the first time, will be no small feat for County staff who determine eligibility and maintain cases. At a minimum, our County will need sufficient funding to administer the core policy changes, including increasing staffing capacity, as well as exploring options to improve technology and business processes to accommodate the SSI/SSP population. [MODIFY BASED ON WHAT YOUR COUNTY IS ALREADY DOING OR NOT]: For example, in order to ensure that the CalFresh application process is seamless for SSI/SSP recipients, our County should be providing flexible interview scheduling and technology solutions like electronic signatures that would allow people to apply entirely by telephone. Critical features like this will ensure this population receives the 100% federally-funded nutrition benefits to which they are entitled, providing long-term health and financial returns on this one-time investment.

We appreciate the cooperation from the state and counties in implementing this large policy change. By all of us stretching a little further we can help reduce poverty, hunger and homelessness among the vulnerable SSI population. We appreciate your consideration of our request and we look forward to working with the county to make the end of SSI cash-out a policy triumph.

Sincerely,

xxx

CCs:

CWDA

Local Welfare Director

State Assembly Member

State Senator

Congressperson

1. CA Legislative Information: <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB1811> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. SSA: <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_sc/2017/ca.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. DSS: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/CDSS-Programs/SSI-SSP/SSI-SSP-Eligibility-Summary> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. SSA: <https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-11125.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See 7 C.F.R. § 273.20. This policy history of SSI/SSP recipients being barred from SNAP dates back to 1974, when states had the option to increase their state supplementary payment rather than administer SNAP to SSI/SSP recipients. Like many other states, California opted to increase the state’s monthly SSP grant by $10 as a means to achieve administrative savings without significantly reducing benefit amounts. Over time, the criteria for maintaining the state’s cash-out policy has changed and the value of the state’s SSI/SSP benefit payment has eroded. This policy is commonly referred to as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) cash-out. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Benefits Data Trust: <https://bdtrust.org/what-we-do/senior-snap-research/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. USDA ERS: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/economic-linkages/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. CAFB: <http://cafoodbanks.org/federal-policy-resource-page> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. USDA ERS: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/economic-linkages/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)