



May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Skinner  
 Chair, Senate Budget Committee  
 California State Senate  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting  
 Chair, Assembly Budget Committee  
 California State Assembly  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable John Laird  
 Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee #1  
 California State Senate  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Kevin McCarty  
 Chair, Assembly Budget Sub Committee #2  
 California State Assembly  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Budget Requests: Free School Meals For All, BOOST Nutrition, and Healthy California Grown Meals**

Dear California Budget leaders,

We, the undersigned 177 organizations, write to you in unity in support of the 2021 Budget Act providing urgent funding to support several policies to reduce child hunger, improve nutrition and educational outcomes, and maximize federal resources available through the Child Nutrition

programs. These transformative changes will advance toward a hunger-free future for our children, provide fundamental support for our essential school nutrition workforce, and bolster our critical agricultural sector.

Specifically, we are asking that the 2021 Budget Act include the following provisions:

1. establish a mechanism to provide free school meals for all California K-12 students;
2. provide grants to promote access to healthy, freshly prepared food grown by California farmers provided by California's school nutrition workforce;
3. establish the Better Out Of School Time (BOOST) Nutrition Grab and Go program to ensure low-income children have access to food benefits when schools are not in session;
4. adopt report language to identify strategies to feed children during school closures when in person service is challenged, such as Pandemic EBT has done during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
5. provide additional financial resources to all public school nutrition departments that face additional costs and lost revenue in feeding students during the pandemic.

Although California produces nearly half of our country's fruits and vegetables, our kids are going hungry at alarming rates. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, over two million California children were experiencing food insecurity and struggling to receive adequate nutrition. Now, as schools are closed and families struggle to pay bills, food insecurity in California has skyrocketed to levels never before seen. The hunger crisis is hitting communities of color the hardest, with Black and Latinx families with children reporting food insecurity twice that of white households. While the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken steps to allow the continued service of free school meals, this de-facto free meal service is set to expire at the end of the 2021-22 school year, taking away a critical nutritional resource from children and families as they continue to experience economic hardship.

Schools and essential nutrition service workers have proven themselves to be trusted community lifelines for students and families. The budget requests we are asking for will allow our schools to serve free meals to all students as the negative economic stresses of the pandemic continue to impact California families in the years to come.

Aside from the immediate need to reduce child hunger, a body of evidence shows that receiving proper nutrition benefits child development, behavior, ability to learn, and the creation of lifelong healthy habits.<sup>1</sup> California's roughly 6.2 million K-12 students are in the midst of obtaining an education that will have monumental impacts on the rest of their lives. If funded, these budget requests will ensure that each one of them has the nutrition they need to learn and thrive — a great equalizer for all students regardless of family income.

Moreover, our schools purchasing more school food from local farmers will bolster the state's economy and support the resiliency of our California farmers. Providing grant funding is critical

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<sup>1</sup> A compilation of research is available here: Allyson Perez. Food Research & Action Center. It's Time for School Meals For All. <https://frac.org/blog/its-time-for-free-school-meals-for-all>.

to support our school nutrition service workers to procure, prepare, and serve fresh, healthy California-grown foods to our children. Grant funding is vital to help meet these additional expenses and will bring several long-term benefits, including to: support California's agricultural producers, strengthen farm-to-school partnerships, improve children's health, and reduce the climate footprint of our food system.

These provisions of this package will go a long way to prevent hunger and improve nutrition while school is in session, but we must take additional action to support low-income students when schools are not in session that are proven to be the times of greatest hunger.

Just this week, President Biden and Vice President Harris announced the American Families Plan,<sup>2</sup> including a proposal for a permanent nationwide Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program. What we have learned during the pandemic is that this kind of out of school time EBT program can significantly reduce hunger among children, and that it works even better when students also have access to grab and go meals as was the case throughout California.<sup>3</sup> We request that the Budget Act fund Better Out Of School Time (BOOST) Nutrition Grab-And-Go lunch service for summer and other school breaks of one week (5 school days) or longer.

While we celebrate the Biden-Harris Administration's proposed permanent Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program, we need solutions during all school closures. As critical as the long summer months are, children go hungry during the winter and other scheduled breaks, and out of school time EBT is even more critical as schools re-evaluate the traditional agrarian calendar.

What's more, we know that California's diverse disasters challenge in person meal service as a means to address child hunger during these crises. From [the Northridge earthquake that shut down the entire Los Angeles Unified School District for a week](#) to the Camp Fire tragedy that was so severe children became "refugees in their own country",<sup>4</sup> our prepared meal programs have been challenged. Current federal law lacks imagination for how to ensure children are served during these great disasters. New solutions are critical, as we know that disasters strike hardest for children in greatest need.

We are requesting report language for DSS and CDE to identify improved strategies for these circumstances, such as models proven to feed children during disasters such as Pandemic EBT did during the COVID pandemic.<sup>5</sup> These strategies should include but not be limited to establishing a state-operated BOOST EBT program to prevent child hunger during disasters.

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<sup>2</sup> White House. American Families Plan Fact Sheet. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/28/fact-sheet-the-american-families-plan/>

<sup>3</sup> Rocio Perez. Pandemic-EBT in California: Lessons and Opportunities to End Childhood Hunger. [https://www.cafoodbanks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021\\_CAFB\\_Pandemic-EBT\\_Report.pdf](https://www.cafoodbanks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021_CAFB_Pandemic-EBT_Report.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Reuters. Refugees in Their Own Country. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-wildfires-displacement/refugees-in-their-own-country-as-wildfire-destroys-california-towns-idUSKBN26N1MW>.

<sup>5</sup> California Department of Social Services. Pandemic EBT 1.0 Outcomes Report. <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/EBT/Pandemic/P-EBT-Outcomes-Report.pdf>.

If funded, these investments will reduce child hunger, improve the school academic environment, help low-income families, and provide economic and social benefits that support California farmers. For these reasons, our 177 organizations are proud to support these requests and urge investment in these critical programs in the 2021 Budget Act.

Sincerely,

9to5

Acterra

Agricultural Institute of Marin

Alameda County Community Food Bank

Alliance of Nurse for Healthy Environments - ANHE

Alum Rock Union Elementary School District

AKI

Amador Tuolumne Community Action Agency

American Academy of Pediatrics, California

American Diabetes Association

American Heart Association

American Legion, Santa Cruz

Asian Americans for Housing and Environmental Justice

Asian Food Trade Association

Bay Area Community Resources

Bay Area Legal Aid

Bay Area Nutrition and Physical Activity Collaborative

Bay Area Ranchers Coop BAR-C

California Association of Food Banks

California Food and Farming Network

California Immigrant Policy Center

California State PTA

Californians for Disability Rights, Inc.

Calistoga Joint Unified School District

Center for Ecoliteracy

Center for Science in the Public Interest

Central California Food Bank

Central Kitchen

Ceres Community Project

Children's Advocacy Institute

City of Watsonville Environmental Science Workshop

Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations

Coastside Hope

Common Sense Media

Community Action of Napa Valley, Food Bank

Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County

Community Food Bank of Stockton  
Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley  
Compass Family Services  
Conscious Kitchen  
Cultiva La Salud  
Dignity Health Connected Living, North State Food Bank  
Dolores Huerta Foundation  
Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation  
Emergency Food Bank of Stockton  
End Child Poverty California/GRACE Institute  
Environmental Working Group  
EPIC  
Equal Rights Advocates  
Extra Food  
Feeding San Diego  
Feeding America Riverside & San Bernardino Counties  
Fiber Shed  
FIND Food Bank  
Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano  
Food Bank of Eldorado County  
Food Bank of Santa Barbara County  
Food Bank for Monterey County  
Food For People  
Food Link for Tulare County  
Food Matters  
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)  
Food Share of Ventura County  
Food Tribe  
FoodCorps  
Fort Bragg Food Bank  
Foster Poultry Farms  
Fresh Approach  
Fresno Barrios Unidos  
Friends Committee on Legislation of California  
Friends of the Earth  
Frog Hollow Farm  
GLIDE  
Growing the Table  
Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz County  
Healthier Kids Foundation  
Healthy Day Partners  
Healthy Schools Campaign  
Holy Cross Food Pantry  
Housing on Merit

Hunger Action Los Angeles  
Imperial Valley Food Bank  
Inland Equity Partnership  
Innovative Health Solutions  
Interfaith Food Bank for Amador County  
Jacob's Heart Cancer Support Services  
K12 Food Pros  
Kehillat Israel  
King Community Action Agency  
Koreatown Youth & Community Center  
LA FOWLER, LLC  
Lakeport Unified School District  
Lakeside Union School District  
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California  
Long Beach Unified School District  
Los Angeles Community Action Network  
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank  
LunchAssist  
Mar Vista Homeless Task Force  
Marin Food Policy Council  
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger  
Merced County Food Bank  
Moreland School District  
Morgan Hill Unified School District  
Morris Grassfed  
National Association of Social Workers California  
National Council of Jewish Women California Policy Advocacy Network  
National Farm to School Network  
National Women's Political Caucus of California  
NextGen California  
No Kid Hungry  
NOSH - Napa's Operative for School food Health  
Nourish California  
Oakland Food Policy Council  
Oakland Unified School District  
Office of Kat Taylor  
Orange County Food Bank  
ParentChild+ Bay Area  
Pesticide Action Network  
Placer County Food Bank  
Project Ropa  
Redwood Empire Food Bank  
River City Food Bank  
Root Down Farm, LLC

Roots of Change  
Sacramento City USD  
Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services  
Sacramento Food Policy Council  
Salud Para La Gente  
San Diego Childhood Obesity Initiative  
San Diego Food Bank  
San Diego Hunger Coalition  
San Diego Unified School District  
San Francisco Senior & Disability Action  
San Francisco-Marin Food Bank  
San Jose Bridge Communities  
San Luis Obispo Food Bank  
San Ramon Valley Unified School District  
Santa Cruz American Legion Post 64  
Santa Cruz City Schools  
Santa Cruz Community Health Centers  
Santa Cruz Medical Society  
Santa Rosa City Schools  
Second Harvest Food Bank Orange County  
Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County  
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley  
Second Harvest of the Greater Valley  
Senior & Disability Action San Francisco  
Sierra Harvest  
Silicon Valley Council of Nonprofits  
SLCUSD Food  
Slow Food California  
Solana Beach School District  
SRVUSD Child Nutrition  
State Policy Sr. Manager [Correct to Latino Coalition for a Healthy California]  
Stemple Creek Ranch  
Stronger California Advocates Network  
Sustainable Agriculture Education  
Teen Kitchen Project  
The Gubbio Project  
The HEAL Project  
The Praxis Project  
The Resource Connection Food Bank  
The San Diego County Childhood Obesity  
The Women's Building  
TomKat Ranch  
Turning Green / Conscious Kitchen  
United States Healthful Food Council Inc., DBA Eat REAL

Urban & Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College  
Village Lutheran Church and Interfaith Center  
Western Center on Law and Poverty  
Westside Coalition  
Westside Food Bank  
Westside Infant-Family Network (WIN)  
Westwood Presbyterian Church  
Yolo Food Bank  
Yuba-Sutter Food Bank

Cc: Members of the Senate Budget & Fiscal Review SubCommittee #1  
Members of the Assembly Budget Committee SubCommittee #2  
Senate President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins  
Speaker of the Assembly Anthony Rendon  
Office of Governor Gavin Newsom  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond  
Kim Johnson, Director, California Department of Social Services  
Keely Bosler, Director, California Department of Finance  
Stacy Dean, Deputy Under Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture