

## AB 221 (Santiago, Chiu, Gipson, R. Rivas, S. Rubio) Emergency Food Assistance for All

### Bill Summary

AB 221 would provide \$600 of emergency food assistance to low-income Californians during COVID-19. This bill would also require the State Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide recommendations for a permanent food assistance program that meets the needs of all food insecure Californians.

### Existing Law

Federal law establishes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known in California as CalFresh, to provide low-income Americans with assistance to purchase nutritional foods (7 U.S. Code Section 2011).

Federal law establishes the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) Act of 2020 to provide food assistance for eligible children during periods of school closure due to a public health emergency (Public Law 116-127; 7 U.S.C. 2011).

State law establishes the CalFresh program (federally funded) to provide monthly food benefits to low-income individuals and families (Welfare Institutions Code Section 18900.2.).

### Background

COVID-19 has devastated California's economy, leading to high levels of unemployment and food insecurity. Since the beginning of the pandemic, over 7 million Californians have applied for unemployment insurance and as of early January 2021, 2.8 million Californians were receiving regular unemployment benefits. Many struggle to pay for rent, mortgages, food and other basic necessities. These burdens are disproportionately affecting various groups

across the state, including Black and Latinx communities.

As of May 2021, 19.8% of Californians are experiencing food insecurity, meaning nearly 7 million people do not have sufficient access to food, with an even higher rate of 25% for households with children. Rates of food insecurity are worse when examining data by race, with an astonishing 35.5% of Black households with children and 27% of Latinx households with children reporting food insecurity.

In March 2020, the federal government issued P-EBT, granting eligible low-income households a one-time allotment of \$250 to \$400 per child to spend on groceries. Eligible families in California received P-EBT cards from March-June of 2020 and received an extension in August and September of 2020. Research suggests that P-EBT reduced food hardship amongst the lowest income children by 30% percent in the week following its distribution.

### Need for AB 221

Despite the federal government providing one-time P-EBT assistance and the state offering limited assistance via CalFresh, millions of families continue to need emergency food assistance, including our undocumented communities who are excluded from CalFresh and other social safety nets. As the pandemic evolves, it is imperative we support families, children and single individuals by providing food assistance during this crisis.

In order to provide all California residents with enough support to withstand this crisis, AB 221 would provide \$600 of emergency food assistance for low-income California residents, regardless of legal status, struggling financially due to COVID-19.

Each eligible person would receive a one-time use, prepaid card loaded with \$600 to spend on groceries. Multiple adults per household would be able to receive one of the prepaid cards. Local food banks and other nonprofit organizations would distribute the benefits on two different distribution periods at least one month apart. This bill would also require CDSS to conduct a study to make recommendations on how to establish a permanent food assistance program that is available to all food-insecure Californians.

AB 221 would address the current overwhelming rates of food insecurity and prevent more Californians from falling into poverty or homelessness.

### **Support**

---

California Association of Food Banks  
(Co-sponsor)  
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights  
(Co-sponsor)  
Western Center on Law & Poverty  
(Co-sponsor)  
Agricultural Institute of Marin  
Alameda County Community Food Bank  
American Academy of Pediatrics, California  
California Academy of Child and Adolescent  
Psychiatry  
California Alternative Payment Program  
Association  
California Climate and Agriculture Network  
California Conference of Machinists  
California Food and Farming Network  
California Health+ Advocates  
California Immigrant Policy Center  
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation

California Teamsters  
Californians for Pesticide Reform  
Carbon Cycle Institute  
Ceres Community Project  
City of Long Beach  
City of San Diego  
City of Watsonville  
Coalition of California Welfare Rights  
Organizations  
Community Action Agency of Butte County, Inc.  
Community Action Partnership of Orange  
County  
Conference of the Amalgamated Transit Union  
Consumer Attorneys of California  
County of Los Angeles  
County of Santa Clara  
County Welfare Directors Association of  
California  
Courage California  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Engineers and Scientists of California, IFPTE  
Local 20  
Environmental Working Group  
Fibershed  
First 5 California  
Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano  
Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo County  
Food for People, the Food Bank of Humboldt  
County  
Friends of the Earth  
GLIDE  
Hunger Action Los Angeles  
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California  
Leadership Counsel for Justice and  
Accountability  
Los Angeles County Office of Education  
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank  
Lutheran Office of Public Policy California  
Marin Food Policy Council  
National Young Farmers Coalition  
NextGen California  
Nourish California  
Pesticide Action Network North America  
Professional and Technical Engineers of  
America, IFPTE Local 21

River City Food Bank  
Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services  
San Francisco-Marin Food Bank  
Second Harvest of the Greater Valley  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz  
County  
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley  
SEIU California  
Sierra Harvest  
Sustainable Agriculture Education  
The Praxis Project  
The Resource Connection Food Bank  
Unite Here, AFL-CIO  
United Food and Commercial Workers,  
Western States Council  
Utility Workers Union of America

### **Opposition**

---

None on file.

### **For More Information**

---

Stephanie Gerstle  
Office of Assembly Member Miguel Santiago  
916.319.2053 | [Stephanie.Gerstle@asm.ca.gov](mailto:Stephanie.Gerstle@asm.ca.gov)