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
Californiaans 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

**Opinion**
None on file.

**For More Information**
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