



January 14, 2022

The Honorable Anthony J. Portantino, Chairperson
 Senate Appropriations Committee
 1020 N Street, Room 412
 Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 641 (Skinner) – CalFresh for College Students Act – SUPPORT

Dear Chairperson Portantino,

Our 44 organizations are writing to you in support of Senate Bill 641 (Skinner). College students in California go hungry at an alarming rate. [The Legislative Analyst's Office \(LAO\) reports that 44% of undergraduates and 26% of graduate students in CA experience food insecurity.](#) These numbers are even worse for community college students. College students who have limited access to nutritional resources experience negative impacts on their academic career and are more likely to drop out before graduating. SB 641 works to address college student hunger by codifying the regulations issued by the Department of Social Services (DSS) at the recommendation of the workgroup established by AB 1930 (Skinner, 2014) which sought to make CalFresh benefits more accessible to eligible college students.

It is unacceptable in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, college students are still going hungry. A 2013 study of Pell Grant students found that 23% of these high performing students from low-income families experience at least one day each month in which they go without food and 12% reported having unintentionally lost weight because they could not afford food. In 2019, CA's college student hunger rate was 10% higher than the national average.

Compounding this already problematic reality is that [COVID-19 has worsened hunger among higher education students, with nearly 1 in 4 students becoming less food secure](#), on top of existing food insecurity, with deep disparities for racial and ethnic minority students. From the high school graduating class of 2021, who have already lost so much and will face great uncertainty as they enter college, to college students hoping to graduate this spring in [an economy that has been shaken to the bone](#), our country's college students are suffering great losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The setbacks will be even more significant for those students who are low-income and the first in their families to attend college.

One of California's most important anti-hunger programs is CalFresh (SNAP), yet [only 22% of eligible college students are participating in CalFresh](#), which is a tremendous missed opportunity for students that could be receiving vital Federal assistance for purchasing food. In addition, [every dollar of CalFresh spent generates \\$1.8 in economic activity during an economic downturn](#), making it an important program for California. In the face of these low CalFresh participation rates, the CA legislature has led the nation in seeking solutions to college student hunger. In 2014, CA established a workgroup to identify policies that would increase access to CalFresh food assistance for eligible college students (AB 1930, Skinner).

Since the enactment of AB 1930, the state has adopted several of the workgroup's recommendations, but some of these recommendations remain only sub-regulatory guidance and have not been statutorily mandated. SB 641 seeks to codify the recommendations of the College Hunger Working Group and add data reporting requirements for the DSS and county human services agencies so that the state may better track progress in participation among CalFresh eligible college students and determine how better to serve these students in the future.

SB 641 focuses on continuing to remove the barriers to college students seeking to access CalFresh food assistance. Specifically, SB 641 will do the following four key things.

First, it will codify guidance issued pursuant to the College Hunger Working Group established by AB 1930 (Skinner, 2014), such as requiring the DSS to maintain and update a list of programs that would exempt them from student eligibility rules, and providing instructions for county human service agencies that will help them to minimize the document verification burden for students.

Second, it will require counties and DSS to report the number of students eligible for, and participating in CalFresh by county and by higher education institution, if possible. [For example, the California Department of Social Services estimates that in 2020 the annualized average number of students receiving CalFresh was 127,360, while the total number of students likely eligible was between 416,471 and 689,233.](#)

Third, it will require the DSS to submit a report to the state estimating additional funds needed to adequately and timely serve all college students currently eligible for CalFresh benefits under current federal law and an estimate on administrative savings that would result if an Act of

Congress reform federal law as has been proposed by the Federal EATS Act introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Jimmy Gomez (D-CA).

Fourth, it will require DSS to convene a workgroup to identify the steps necessary to establish a CalFresh application submission process that can accommodate the large influx of applications received during the beginning of a college term in counties where significant numbers of students reside.

There is no reason why California shouldn't be planning to end college student hunger, by fully leveraging the CalFresh program. For all of the reasons outlined in this letter, we are proud to support SB 641.

Sincerely,

Alameda County Community Food Bank
Alchemist Community Development Corporation
Berkeley Food Network
California Association of Food Banks
California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office
Center for Healthy Communities at California State University, Chico
Central California Food Bank
Community Action Agency of Butte County, Inc.
Community Action of Napa Valley
Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County
CSU Centers for Equitable Higher Education
Everyone's Harvest
FIND Food Bank
Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
Food for People
Food Share of Ventura County
Foodbank of Santa Barbara County
GLIDE
Hunger Action Los Angeles
Imperial Valley Food Bank
Los Angeles Food Policy Council
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
Nourish California
Nutrition and Fitness Collaborative of the Central Coast
Redwood Empire Food Bank
Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services
San Diego Food Bank
San Diego Hunger Coalition
San Francisco-Marin Food Bank
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County
Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz County
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley
Second Harvest of the Greater Valley
Sierra Harvest
SPUR
The Gubbio Project

The Women's Building
unBox
University of California Graduate & Professional Council
Western Center on Law and Poverty
Westside Food Bank
Yolo Food Bank
Young Invincibles

CC: Office of Senator Nancy Skinner