



**July 15, 2022**

To: The White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health

**Re: Recommendations from the California Association of Food Banks**

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris,

On behalf of the California Association of Food Banks (CAFB), we offer this letter to outline the issues to consider for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health with the goal of finally achieving a hunger-free future for the nation. CAFB leads the collective effort to end hunger in California. We work alongside our 41-member food banks and on behalf of hungry Californians. We ensure food banks have the tools and resources they need, so they can focus on what they do best: feed our communities. Our mission is to end hunger in California.

We also work to change the systems that create hunger in the first place. As an anti-hunger leader in California, we advocate for strong nutrition policies, connecting communities to invaluable state and federal programs and resources, for a well-nourished and hunger-free California, where all people have enough food to lead a healthy life. We are always grateful for your leadership in ending hunger and look forward to working closely with you on the conference and in pursuit of ending hunger.

While our recommendations reflect our expertise in the federal nutrition programs, we urge your Administration to ensure a whole-of-government approach, following the direction of Chairman McGovern that the Conference and national strategy must include the transportation, affordable housing, education, workforce, and other basic needs necessary to uproot the causes of hunger. Furthermore, we commend the work to date and urge that your Administration to center people with lived expertise with hunger and poverty to be at the table designing the national strategy to end hunger in America.

To that end, CAFB held two virtual listening sessions to inform the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health. Given the virtual format of both events, participants from across California were able to join, representing the North Coast, North Bay, Bay Area, Central Coast, Los Angeles, the Sacramento Valley, and San Diego.

- **June 28th** - 28 participants from our food bank network
- **July 6th** - 21 participants with lived experience

The following policy recommendations are informed by the experiences and ideas shared by the many participants of our virtual listening sessions:

- [EATS Act \(H.R. 1919 - Rep. Gomez/S. 2515 - Sen. Gillibrand\)](#)
- [Closing the Meal Gap Act \(H.R. 4077 - Rep. Adams/S. 2192 - Sen. Gillibrand\)](#)
- [Improving Access to Nutrition Act \(H.R. 1753 - Rep. Lee\)](#)
- [SNAP PLUS Act \(H.R. 6338 - Rep. Meng\)](#)
- [Lift the Bar Act \(H.R. 5227 - Rep. Jayapal\)](#)
- [Making Essentials Available and Lawful \(MEAL\) Act \(H.R. 2837 - Rep. Cohen\)](#)
- [Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021 \(S. 1530 - Sen. Sanders/H.R. 3115 - Rep. Omar\)](#)
- [Support Kids Not Red Tape Act \(S. 3979 - Sen. Stabenow\)](#)
- [Keeping School Meals Flexible Act \(H.R. 6613 - Rep. Spanberger\)](#)
- [Stop Child Hunger Act \(S. 1831 – Sen. Murray/H.R. 3519\)](#)
- [Summer Meals Act of 2021 \(S. 1170 - Sen. Murray/H.R. 783 - Rep. Levin\)](#)
- [Access to Healthy Foods for Young Children Act \(S.1270 - Sen. Casey\)](#)
- [Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act \(H.R. 5919- Rep. Bonamici\)](#)
- [Wise Investment in Children Act \(WIC Act\) \(S. 853 - Sen. Casey/H.R. 2011 - Rep. DeLauro\)](#)
- [ASSET ACT \(S. 1809 - Sen. Coons/H.R. 3822 - Rep. Gomez\)](#)
- [Housing is Infrastructure Act \(H.R. 4497 – Rep. Waters\)](#)
- [Ending Homelessness Act \(H.R. 4496 – Rep. Waters\)](#)
- [Eviction Crisis Act \(S. 2182 – Sen. Bennet\)](#)
- [Raise the Wage Act \(S. 53 – Sen. Sanders/H.R. 603 – Rep. Scott\)](#)
- [Freedom to Vote Act \(S.2747 - Sen. Klobuchar\)](#)
- [For the People Act \(S.1 - Sen. Merkley/H.R. 1 - Rep. Sarbanes\)](#)

As outlined below in more detail, we offer extensive rationale both from quantitative research that underscores the urgency of policy action needed, and qualitative data from the frontlines of the anti-hunger movement (see attached appendix for additional quotes from listening session participants).

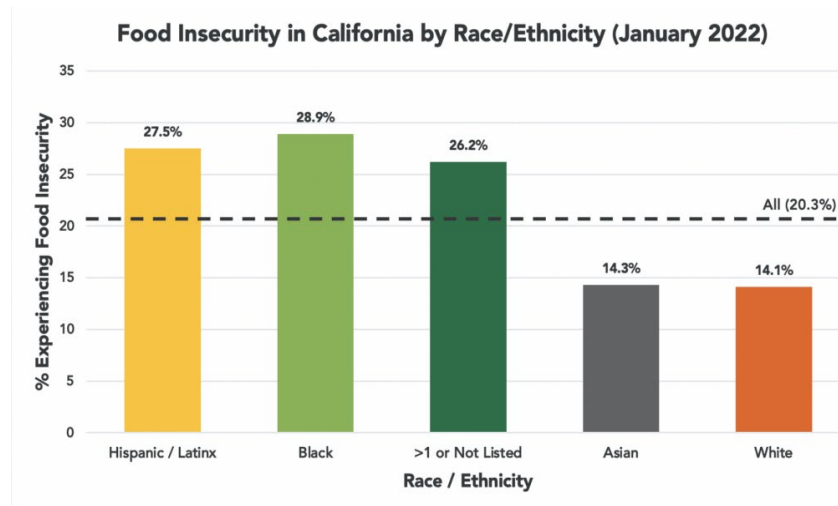
## **Hunger in California**

Hunger remains alarmingly high even as the COVID-19 pandemic surges subside in California, and the larger economic and social impact will no doubt be felt for years to come. The latest data shows that [8 million Californians - or 20% of our population - are experiencing food insecurity](#), with deep disparities for Black and Latinx people.

This means that 1 in 5 Californians, with significant inequities for low-income communities of color, are living with the toxic stress and trauma of not knowing where their next meal is coming from, even if they eventually manage to eat.

Within that population, a staggering number of Californians report food insufficiency, the worst and most extreme form of hunger. The most recent estimates from December 13 are that [2,050,000 adults, and approximately 618,000 children, actively lack enough to eat right now.](#)

This is simply unacceptable.



Food banks across California are also seeing the direct impact of this level of hunger at their food distribution sites in their communities. In a recent survey of our food bank members, most reported that they are still serving between 1.5 to 3 times the number of people they were serving pre-Pandemic, and shockingly, nearly half reported that they are serving between double to triple the number of people compared to 2019.

This is compounded by [record-setting food inflation](#), from pandemic related supply shocks and other market disruptions. [Grocery prices have risen 10.8% in the past year, the largest 12-month increase in food prices in nearly 42 years.](#)

We offer several recent examples from food banks in our network:

- **Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services:** “Our walkup line is growing. We’re hearing from people that they don’t want to waste their gas sitting in the drive-through line while waiting for their boxes,” said spokesperson Kevin Buffalino. “People are on that razor’s edge right now, and the cost of gas is eating into their food budgets.” They also highlighted that the price they are paying per dozen eggs has more than doubled in recent months, from \$0.93 to \$2.20, and they’ve seen a 40% increase in people served in the last month. ([Los Angeles Times](#), 4/20/2022)
- **Santa Barbara Food Bank:** “Inflation is the major issue. We saw our numbers begin to trail off and we thought, ‘Great, we’re getting over COVID.’ Now we’re up again,” said Santa Barbara Food Bank CEO Erik Talkin. “Food and gas are significant for individual people — if you’re a low-income family then you spend a big chunk of your money on

those two things that are the hardest hit. But it's also highly significant for the food bank. We're spending a lot of money on the logistics of moving food around." ([Los Angeles Times](#), 4/20/2022)

- **Alameda County Community Food Bank:** "Their grocery money isn't going as far as it used to. Gas prices are high. Many people who come here either depend on us or use it to supplement their meals," said program coordinator Glenn Hilado as he walked the car line checking in with people before the drive-through opened. That Wednesday ended up being the distribution site's busiest in a year-and-a-half, Altfest said. It was also the day the food bank distributed eggs, a popular item. The nonprofit food bank now estimates one in four Alameda County residents to be food insecure, compared to one in five before the pandemic. ([San Francisco Chronicle](#), 4/26/2022)
- **Second Harvest of Silicon Valley:** Over at Second Harvest of Silicon Valley, the food bank served 470,000 people in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties in March, about 70,000 more than the previous month. "Anecdotally, we are hearing from clients and from our partners that more people are feeling the pressures of the increased costs of groceries and gas and need some support," said Diane Baker Hayward, a spokeswoman for Second Harvest. ([San Francisco Chronicle](#), 4/26/2022)

One of the root causes of hunger in California is income inequality, the legacy of inequitable access to economic opportunity for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other communities that have faced discrimination and barriers to prosperity. The gap between high and low income families is among the largest in the nation. [Families at the top of the income distribution earned 11 times more than families at the bottom](#) (\$270,000 vs. \$25,000 for the 90th and 10th percentiles, respectively). California's income distribution reflects high rates of poverty. [Income is frequently not enough to meet basic needs](#) (on average a family of four requires about \$36,000). Families in the bottom third of the income distribution are at risk of poverty absent major safety net programs. The stark reality for millions of Californians is that they are struggling to make ends meet. We need to ensure people have food and resources they need to thrive.

When asked to talk about how hunger impacts people and communities, we heard a wide range of responses from participants in our listening sessions. One of the most common points that participants made was that people from all walks of life can experience hunger. Several of these sentiments are highlighted below:

- "My situation is first off, I actually only eat maybe one time a day or every other day. It's hard but you have to struggle a lot until things can get better." –Community member in Los Angeles
- "When I was a struggling college student, I got a job at the school cafeteria intentionally so at the end of the night I could stash some of the leftovers behind the dumpster. That was part of my way to be able to afford rent and tuition and be able to feed myself." –Community member in Oceanside

- “For my family, it’s nutrition, the tough choices – am I going to buy something that’s healthy and nutritious or the box food that’s cheaper, like a box of hamburger helper or going to be able to cook a meal with fresh ingredients.” –Anti-hunger worker with lived experience
- “The biggest surprise for most people is how many people who are working are coming to the food bank. There is a perception that it’s all very low income people. But that’s not the case, especially these days. Many people show up [to food pantries] because their budget doesn’t stretch far enough. Many of them are working.” –Stockton Food Bank
- “We have people who are coming to our food bank who are past donors and contributors.” –San Diego Food Bank
- “The perception is that [San Luis Obispo] is a well-off community. But the reality is that 45% of the kids here are eligible for free and reduced price meals. People are also surprised about how many older adults come to access our food distribution sites and resources.” –SLO Food Bank
- “Feeding San Diego works closely with the community colleges, and about half of students are food insecure - the school communities and the public often don’t realize this is the case.” –Feeding San Diego
- “People think that [Santa Cruz] county is really well off and that [anti-hunger] programs aren’t needed. When the community started getting P-EBT, lots of families started coming out interested in CalFresh. Unfortunately many of them didn’t qualify because they were over the income limit by a very small fraction.” –Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz
- “A lot of those people that were just hanging on, may have just been living paycheck to paycheck but able to buy all their stuff and now [with inflation] they’re just so vulnerable. That’s the people that I’ve noticed working people who are just not able to keep up with high gas prices. We have a long commute in the bay area and if people can’t afford to live near where they work [then] gas prices really hit those people hard.[It’s] just true all across California. People who were managing are not managing anymore.” –Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- “People would be surprised it’s your neighbors [who] are deciding between putting food on the table or buying a refrigerator that just went out, or washer and dryer that they need for their house or water heater, or need new tires, it’s the basic necessities.” –Food Share of Ventura County

- “Most of these people [in tourism, hospitality, and construction] have not yet recovered from COVID and [its] financial impact, not just because savings are depleted but also because employment is not stable.” –San Francisco-Marín Food Bank

## **Strengthen SNAP**

SNAP (CalFresh in California) is California’s best defense against hunger, and because of its entitlement status and program design, is one of the most responsive elements of our safety net during economic hardship. Federal nutrition assistance programs, like SNAP, play a critical role in reducing hunger and improving health. Last year, SNAP helped to support 4.4 million Californians – that’s nearly 1 in 9 people. [SNAP brought \\$11 billion in federal food benefits, \\$20 billion in total economic activity, and 272,000 jobs statewide.](#)

Thankfully, following Congress’ bipartisan direction, USDA successfully implemented the 2018 Farm Bill, including a long overdue update to the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP). Unfortunately, [SNAP households face a hunger cliff with the looming end of the Public Health Emergency](#), an average drop of [\\$82 per person per month](#).

Even with the TFP update, SNAP benefits are still inadequate to maintain a healthy diet: SNAP benefits in California will average approximately \$5.50 per person per day once temporary COVID enhancements expire. Government shouldn’t repeat past mistakes from previous crises and should prevent a premature expiration of boosts to food aid while they are still sorely needed.

In both of our listening sessions, the critical importance of SNAP was highlighted time and time again by participants. In conversations with people who have lived experience of hunger, and people who work in the emergency food network, the below ideas were offered as ways to make the SNAP program even stronger and more responsive than it is today. And it is important to remember that these improvements to SNAP will not only help to support the people who directly benefit from the program, but whole communities:

“These are actually investments that bolster the local economy, and create jobs, and create some security, and when we do that we help people reframe how we support people.” –Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz

- **Make SNAP more accessible for college students, by eliminating antiquated and exclusionary rules that deny college students critical food aid that they desperately need.**
  - [The EATS Act \(H.R. 1919 - Rep. Gomez /S. 2515 - Sen. Gillibrand\)](#) would permanently expand SNAP access to low-income college students, addressing this significant inequity in food access, and remove the complex and burdensome rules for county and state administrators.

- “UCSC has a really high rate of food insecurity and homelessness. People don’t think that students are food insecure, but they are.” –Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz
  - Across the country [college students go hungry at an alarming rate](#). College hunger in California has worsened in recent years given our high cost of living and limited access to affordable housing, combined with rising tuition costs: [a staggering 44% of undergraduates and 26% of graduate students in California experience food insecurity](#).
  - [California has much to be proud](#) of when it comes to easing access to CalFresh for college students and supporting them in applying for these vital benefits. Thanks to movement building led by college students, California has established basic needs centers with food pantries and meal sharing programs at many state colleges and is working to improve access to CalFresh.
- **Improve SNAP benefit adequacy, which is especially important today as the cost of food continues to rise.**
    - Several people highlighted how important the SNAP Emergency Allotments have been throughout the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency, which dramatically increased household’s benefit levels:
      - “The boost in SNAP benefits, the Emergency Allotments were really key.” –Alameda County Community Food Bank.
      - “[Emergency Allotments] kept the bottom from dropping out. If they didn’t exist, we’d have such a higher rate of food insecurity. The Emergency Allotments kept those people stable. It was a huge win in terms of social services and how fast it went out, and the waivers transformed what’s possible in terms of services. It helped people get through this. [Emergency Allotments] going away is terrifying in terms of what the ramifications will be.” –Los Angeles Regional Food Bank.
      - “Right now families are getting Emergency Allotments, which have been really helpful. And now a lot of families are really afraid that that’s going to stop and it’s not going to happen anymore. Because they are noticing that it makes a huge difference. A lot of families qualify for the bare minimum, and when they find out that they’re going to get the full benefit amount, they decide to apply. One thing the government can do is to raise the minimum levels of benefits, to something more adequate.” –Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz.
      - “Emergency Allotments were an unheralded response that made a difference.” –Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
    - Especially with the impact of inflation and the cost of food rising dramatically, many participants spoke about the need to permanently increase SNAP benefit levels (both the minimum and the maximum) to match the true cost of food.
      - “With the emergency allotments getting a bit closer, respectful I might say has been huge. How do we make sure SNAP benefits are actually adequate? It should not be pegged to a federal standard, it should be



- based on your local cost of living. It's ludicrous to peg it to a federal standard in a place like California.” –San Francisco-Marin Food Bank
- “Emergency Allotments for larger families could have been higher than what they got [previously], those have been such a huge benefit and when they go away here in California it’s going to hit them so hard as inflation has raised the cost of food. I shudder to think what that will look like when that day finally comes.” –Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- The [Closing the Meal Gap Act \(H.R. 4077 - Rep. Adams/S. 2192 - Sen. Gillibrand\)](#) would increase baseline SNAP benefits, expands SNAP benefits to territories, and eliminates eligibility limits and unrealistic barriers by:
    - Using the Low-Cost Food Plan as the basis for calculating the SNAP formula, increasing the baseline benefits by approximately 30 percent
    - Permanently authorizing the standard medical deduction in every state for seniors and disabled individuals applying for SNAP benefits at a minimum of \$140
    - Eliminating the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction in the SNAP formula for all households
    - Eliminating time-limits on benefits
    - Creating a path to transition those who live and work in U.S. territories to SNAP, thus ending discrimination and expanding benefits for territories
- **Make permanent many of the program flexibilities that states were able to adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic that made the program easier to access.** For example, telephonic signature waivers, and the interview waiver, which not only made it easier for people to apply for benefits, but it also made it easier for workers to process applications:
    - “All the things that made our jobs easier during the pandemic, please don’t take them away. It helped us to do our job and feed more people.” –Food Share Ventura County
    - "Having those waivers and keeping them in place would be fantastic. It would be the best thing the government can do. Not just for the community, but also for the workers. It makes their jobs easier as well.” –Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz
    - “In-person interviews are a challenge for people who do not have flexibility or extra days off.” –Community member
  - **Permanently repeal the harmful ABAWD time-limit rules.**
    - “ABAWD rules need to be really re-evaluated. Need to separate work requirement from CalFresh benefits. We’re going to see a lot of harm done if ABAWD rules come back to CA.” –Community member
    - According to the most recent estimates from 2019 (when California did not have a statewide waiver), there are 570,000 Californians who likely have ABAWD status. [The USDA reports that individuals likely to be cut off by the three-month](#)



[limit have average monthly income of approximately 17% of the federal poverty level and typically qualify for no other income support.](#) The impact on low-income Californians deepens current inequities because it impacts certain populations more than others, including people of color, former foster youth, people with undiagnosed disabilities, family caregivers, non-custodial parents, parents with children in juvenile hall or in child protective services. Regardless of the rule's name, it will also impact children who have parents they don't live with.

- [The Improving Access to Nutrition Act \(H.R. 1753 - Rep. Lee\)](#) would eliminate SNAP's arbitrary three-month time limit and ensure that all people have access to nutrition assistance and stay healthy while seeking full-time work.
- **Expand, improve and make online shopping for SNAP permanent**
  - Authorize USDA to scale up and improve affordability of online SNAP purchasing
  - Expand access to more local vendors: ["Expanding \[online EBT\] access to more local vendors, not just large-scale providers but more accessibility for people to use their benefits at more places like on the internet."](#) –San Francisco-Marin Food Bank
    - Many small retailers and producers lack the e-commerce infrastructure needed to participate in the pilot and to compete with large national chains and online entities. USDA should provide technical and financial assistance to local retailers and producers to incentivize their participation.
    - The [SNAP EBT Modernization Technical Assistance Center grant](#) is a great first step to increasing the diversity of local and small retailers.
  - Online SNAP purchasing, which was [piloted in New York in 2019](#), expanded [nationwide during the pandemic](#). In FY 2021, nearly 4 percent of SNAP redemptions were through SNAP retailers participating in the online pilot.
  - Subsidize online purchasing and delivery fees.
    - The high delivery and service fees are a barrier for SNAP participants.
  - Waive minimum order requirements
  - Improve access to broadband and mobile devices to extend accessibility to more rural communities.
- **Support people paying high housing costs and living in areas with a very high cost of living, and eliminate the cap on the shelter deduction.**
  - ["I would like for the federal government to look and distribute benefits according to the location or the area where people live and their cost of living in that area. For example, Santa Cruz county has a really high cost of living. Usually people have to work 2 jobs. Due to that, they don't qualify for SNAP because their income is too high. This is different from other counties or states where the cost of living is lower."](#) –Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz
  - The [Closing the Meal Gap Act \(H.R. 4077 - Rep. Adams/S. 2192 - Sen. Gillibrand\)](#) includes eliminating the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction in the SNAP formula for all households

- **Expand the accessibility of using SNAP benefits to purchase hot and prepared food and meals.**
  - “I like the general idea that you can buy with the money just food items and not e.g. alcohol. But from a homeless perspective, the non-warm food sucks. We can get deli sandwiches, but nothing that would be warm. One question was if it helped nutrition-wise. That's a yes and no. Just living on fruit and sandwiches and salad sucks over time. Right now it's fine, it's warm, but when it is cold I rather have soup than apples.” –Community member in the Bay Area
  - Allow SNAP beneficiaries to purchase hot food items from retailers that already accept electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards. Families and individuals can benefit from the option to purchase a rotisserie chicken.
  - Additionally, it will increase accessibility to nutritious meals for low-income seniors, people with disabilities, people who are unhoused, and low-income college students who have limited food preparation space or physical ability.
  - Expansion of food purchasing options should also be taken into consideration for increasing certifiable online retailers.
  - The Restaurant Meal Program is [currently a state option](#) that allows people to use their benefits at restaurants if they have a need like homelessness, disability or elderly. [California is one of the states participating in the program.](#)
  - The [SNAP PLUS Act \(HR 6338 - Rep. Meng\)](#) would remove the restriction on hot prepared foods to expand the choices SNAP customers have.
  
- **Expand access to immigrants who power our economy**
  - One undocumented college student in a listening session explained that because of their immigration status, they couldn't qualify for many programs. She said, “I had to skip meals as a result.” –Community member
  - “There is still fear about being a public charge that parents have decided not to apply for public benefits that they and/or their children are eligible for.” –Community member
  - “One of the challenges confronting our immigrant community is [the] language [barrier] and information where there are services and resources for this community.” –Community member
  - Thaw the Public Charge chill
    - Months after the Biden Administration ended the 2019 public charge regulations, the “chilling effect” those policies created continues to deter millions in immigrant families from getting the health and human services
    - Ensure that families have access to timely and accurate information about immigrant eligibility for benefits and the public charge rule, through multilingual community outreach, public statements, front-line staff trainings, and inter-agency coordination.
    - Issue an anti-racist public charge rule and enhance outreach to the public.

- Lead and improve outreach to the public about public charge. Hearing a clear and consistent message from the Federal government allows state and local officials to echo and leverage the messages from the Federal government to educate their constituencies and allows them to use pre-existing resources (e.g. flyers in multiple languages).
      - [Toolkit for state and local government officials to take action](#)
    - The [Lift the Bar Act \(H.R. 5227 - Rep. Jayapal\)](#) would expand healthy care, nutrition assistance, and other critical support programs to immigrants by:
      - Eliminating the five-year bar (i.e., waiting period) for access to Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP, TANF, and the SSI program
      - Repealing key provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 that restrict eligibility, erect barriers, and deter access to critical services for immigrants with sponsors
      - Including any individual who is lawfully present in the U.S. in the definition of “qualified noncitizen,” which is used to determine eligibility for many federal programs
      - Restoring flexibilities for states and localities to provide benefits to immigrants with their own funds
- **Full repeal of the SNAP/TANF ban**
  - No one should be sentenced to a lifetime of hunger. A real second chance means ending perpetual punishments that keep people from meeting their basic needs.
  - Repealing the lifetime SNAP/TANF drug felony ban would eliminate a cruel and counterproductive policy that has disproportionately exacerbated hunger and poverty for women and people of color who are statistically more likely to be convicted of a drug felony and therefore more likely to be denied eligibility for SNAP and TANF assistance.
  - Food insecurity is pervasive among people transitioning from the criminal legal system and families with an adult who is banned from benefits have access to less food and support. Repealing this ban would improve equitable and affordable access to critical SNAP and TANF for food insecure and impoverished individuals and families, as well as mitigate racial disparities in eligibility for SNAP and TANF that are perpetuated by this policy.
  - Repealing the SNAP/TANF ban would also enable individuals to focus on securing employment, housing and other essentials rather than locating food and other basic needs for themselves and dependents. Moreover, repealing the SNAP/TANF ban would reduce food insecurity related stress that can lead to preventable health problems for adults and children.
  - The [Making Essentials Available and Lawful \(MEAL\) Act \(HR 2837 - Rep. Cohen\)](#) would:
    - Repeals a lifetime ban that prohibits individuals convicted of certain offenses related to the possession, use, or distribution of a controlled

substance from receiving SNAP benefits or assistance under programs funded by TANF block grants.

- Any state law that imposes conditions on eligibility for SNAP benefits or TANF assistance based on an individual's conviction of such an offense shall have no force or effect.
  - Individuals who are incarcerated and scheduled to be released within 30 days shall qualify as individual households for purposes of SNAP eligibility.
- **Improve Disaster SNAP** so that the program can be more responsive to ensure SNAP benefits despite the increased frequency of natural disasters caused by climate change (e.g. droughts and wildfires) as well as prolonged crises such as pandemics.
  - **Limit overpayment claims** to look-back period of only one year and raise the threshold for which states can pursue claims.

## **Strategies to Fight Child Hunger and Bolster Child Nutrition Programs**

No child should go hungry. But far too many children already live in food insecure households. The latest Census Household Pulse Survey data from March shows that [food insecurity in California for households with children is at 25.8%](#). California made history in 2021 by becoming the first state in the nation to enact healthy school meals for all, ensuring that all children receive meals at school that are free of shame, stigma, and school meal debt. Pandemic EBT has been equally transformational to supplement grocery budgets when school meals are not available, [providing over \\$8 billion in benefits](#) during the first two years of program implementation. Nationwide [\\$43.7 billion in benefits have been provided to 37 million pre-school and school aged children](#). Government must leverage key advances during COVID-19 to build a hunger-free future for our children. “Look at what worked [during the pandemic] using it as a framework on what we should do in terms of improving the adequacy of our programs. P-EBT worked, Universal Meals worked. God knows what would have happened if we didn’t have this.” –Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano

- **Provide Universal School Meals, because no child should go hungry.** School meals are a critical resource and an educational tool that reduces stigma, ends meal debt, and fosters health, well being, and opportunity. Many participants in our listening sessions spoke about the need to provide school breakfast, lunch, and supper to all students at no charge, and make additional improvements to expand access and increase funding for the child nutrition programs.
  - “We need continued universal access to school meals, and allow children to take home a supper. And we need to expand it beyond K-12. It should go all the way from K-16. There should also be food pantries on every community college and 4-year campus until pay equity is scaled up.” –Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz

- “We need universal free school meals for all. If we can provide textbooks, this should also be politically feasible.” –Alameda County Community Food Bank
- “P-EBT was so easy, and the impact was felt immediately. Alameda has such a large immigrant community, the welcoming effect [that P-EBT had] was huge. P-EBT was outstanding, and so inclusive.” –Alameda County Community Food Bank
- “The income level in California you have to make under the federal standards [for school meals] is so low, that it’s hard to imagine here in Contra Costa.. a family of 4 making \$60k doesn’t qualify. So not only do those people who are not doing well financially in California wouldn’t previously qualify for free school meals.” –Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- The [Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021 \(S. 1530 - Sen. Sanders/H.R. 3115 - Rep. Omar\)](#) would enact many of these priorities:
  - Provide school breakfast and lunch at no charge to all children.
  - Increase school breakfast and school lunch reimbursements rates to match the recommended rates of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study (April 2019).
  - Provide free afterschool and summer meals and snacks to all children.
  - Expand Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) to all low-income children.
  - Provide up to three meals a day and a snack at no charge to children in child care.
  - Provide a 30-cent reimbursement for schools that procure local foods.
- **Extend Child Nutrition Waivers**
  - [The Keep Kids Fed Act](#) was signed into law on June 25 extending child nutrition waivers for summer 2022 as well as school and afterschool meals during the 2022-2023 school year. The bill will help mitigate a summer hunger crisis, support access to child care meals, and provide additional funding and flexibility for school nutrition operations. However, [Congress did not give USDA authority to issue waivers](#) that increased cost to the federal government for school year 2022–2023. This means schools will not be able to offer free meals to all children or receive the Summer Food Service Programs Reimbursement for meals served. We urge additional investments and continued flexibilities to prevent child hunger and support universal access to free school meals so that we can truly keep kids fed.
    - “Expansion of school lunches really did is reduce stigma. Not the one or two kids going through the process [but] when every kids get it, and [has a] spillover effect in destigmatizing other federal food programs in the long run.” –Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
  - The [Support Kids Not Red Tape Act \(S. 3979 - Sen. Stabenow\)](#) would extend the [U.S. Department of Agriculture’s authority to issue child nutrition](#) waivers to address the impacts of COVID-19 through September 30, 2023, giving schools time to recover from the pandemic-related constraints and return to normal operations

- Without this legislation, the authority of the Secretary of Agriculture to establish, grant, or extend a waiver is currently set to expire on June 30, 2022.
    - Authorizes necessary appropriations to carry out this extension, providing schools and summer meal sites the flexibility and resources needed to stay open and keep feeding kids as they manage personnel and supply chain challenges
  - The [Keeping School Meals Flexible Act \(H.R. 6613 - Rep. Spanberger\)](#) would extend the U.S. Department of Agriculture's authority to issue child nutrition waivers to address the impacts of and recovery from COVID-19 through June 30, 2023
    - Without this legislation, the authority of the Secretary of Agriculture to establish, grant, or extend a waiver is currently set to expire on June 30, 2022.
    - Authorizes necessary appropriations to carry out this extension.
- **Expand the Community Eligibility Provision**
  - Statewide CEP would mean 91-96% of the meals served would be reimbursed at the highest federal free rate. This builds on California's historic School Meals for All, enabling vital savings for our state that can be used to reinvest in healthy school meals, workers, and kitchen infrastructure.
- **Create a Nationwide Summer EBT Program**
  - The [Stop Child Hunger Act \(S. 1831 – Sen. Murray/H.R. 3519 – Rep. Levin\)](#) would provide low-income families with children an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card to purchase food when schools close for five days or more, during the summer, school breaks, and unanticipated school closures (such as in response to a pandemic or a natural disaster).
- **Make permanent improvements to the Summer Meals programs.**
  - Make operational waivers and summer flexibilities permanent
  - Allow non-profits like food banks to feed kids all year using the Summer Food Service Program, instead of switching back and forth between Summer Food and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.
  - Improve area eligibility for Summer Meal sites to address barriers to food access.
  - Allow sites to provide three meals a day during the summer.
  - Provides grants for transportation.
  - The [Summer Meals Act of 2021 \(S. 1170 - Sen. Murray/H.R. 783 - Rep. Levin\)](#) would enact many of these priorities:
    - Improves the area eligibility test by lowering it from 50 percent to 40 percent to allow more low-income communities to provide summer meals.
    - Allows nonprofit and local government agencies to provide meals year-round seamlessly through the Summer Food Service Program.
    - Allows all sites to serve three meals



- Provides grant funding to support efforts to reach underserved areas.
- **Expand food access for our youngest children**
  - The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) plays a vital role in stabilizing childcare infrastructure, supports parents' ability to return to work, yet meals and snacks remain out of reach for too many as only 38% of child care programs participate in CACFP
  - Provide universal meals to all children in child care
  - Increase reimbursement rate for providers and sponsors
  - Allow an additional meal or snack for children in a full day of care.
  - Streamline participation for parents and providers by moving to annual eligibility for proprietary child care centers.
  - The [Access to Healthy Foods for Young Children Act \(S.1270 - Sen. Casey\)](#) would strengthen and expand the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) by:
    - allowing another meal or snack for children in a full day of care;
    - creating consistency across programs by allowing annual eligibility for proprietary child care centers;
    - increasing reimbursement rates for providers and sponsors;
    - improving area eligibility; and
    - eliminating overly burdensome and outdated paperwork.
  - The [Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act \(H.R. 5919- Rep. Bonamici\)](#) would make important strides towards improving CACFP:
    - Allowing an additional meal or snack for children in a full day of care, which improves the adequacy of benefits;
    - improving reimbursement rate adjustments for child care home providers, making sure reimbursements keep up with the cost of providing a healthy CACFP meal;
    - streamlining participation for parents and providers by moving to annual eligibility for proprietary child care centers;
    - maximizing technology to eliminate overly burdensome and outdated paperwork; and
    - making improvements to the serious deficiency process.
- **Strengthen and expand the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC)**
  - WIC provides pregnant and postpartum mothers, infants, and young children access to nutritious foods, nutrition education, and breastfeeding support. WIC is the third largest food and nutrition assistance program [serving over 6.2 Million people and half of all infants in the US](#), including almost half of all infants born in the United States. Our state's program fails to reach all young children in need. For example, about 500,000 children enrolled in Medicaid are presumptively eligible for WIC, but not enrolled. Federal policies are necessary to remove the barriers standing between our youngest learners and the food they need.



- The [Wise Investment in Children Act \(WIC Act\) \(S. 853 - Sen. Casey/H.R. 2011 - Rep. DeLauro\)](#) would make several critical improvements to the program:
  - Extends the WIC certification period to two years.
  - Extends program eligibility for children from 5 years until their sixth birthday.
  - Extends postpartum eligibility to two years for all mothers.
- WIC should also allow online shopping options. “WIC doesn't have online shopping like SNAP does. Families have had to risk their health to go shopping in person during COVID. The inequities have been deepened with the formula shortage too, as people who can shop online have been depleting supplies leaving WIC parents to have to risk going in person.” –Community member
  - There is currently a [WIC online ordering pilot](#) with several states participating.
  - Subsidize online purchasing and delivery fees.

### **Support our Ageing and Disabled Neighbors**

- “A ton of the population that we serve are seniors. There are folks who are living on a fixed income and so when your income doesn't change but all your expenses do it becomes even direr.” –San Francisco-Marin Food Bank
- “I worry about a population I know very little about but when I think of persons with a disability – SSI payments keep people substantially below the poverty guidelines. There are targeted nutrition programs like WIC for pregnant women infants and children, school meals, [and] senior nutrition programs like CSFP, but for what may be the most vulnerable population in our community persons with a disability there's certainly nothing targeted to that population but until recently in California, they didn't even qualify got CalFresh. I wonder how that population gets by in light of all that.” –Community Action Partnership of Orange County Food Bank
- **Restart and permanently continue the [Combined Application Projects \(CAP\)](#)** between Social Security Administration (SSA) and USDA to streamline SNAP enrollment for low-income older adults and people with disabilities already identified by SSA
  - People with disabilities and seniors face significant barriers to accessing benefits through SNAP and SSI
  - CAPs effectively reduce barriers
- **Pass and enact provisions in the [ASSET ACT \(S. 1809 - Sen. Coons/H.R. 3822 -Rep. Gomez\)](#)**
  - Raises the asset limits on the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.
  - Eliminates asset limits on SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).
- **Increase access and enhance CSFP** so seniors can access more nutritious, culturally responsive food with dignity and expand to disabled persons:

- Increase the income guidelines. CSFP is at 130% of the federal poverty guidelines, yet programs like TEFAP and WIC are substantially higher. Enrollment has also decreased during COVID, so increasing eligibility would allow the program to be more fully utilized.
- Other strategies that lead to a similar outcome – in the FDIPR program, there is an automatic medical deduction. Applying an automatic across-the-board medical deduction to the income of all CSFP applicants would also make the program more accessible.
- Pilot Project serving persons with a disability through CSFP – persons with a disability under 60 years of age are not presently eligible for CSFP. They are a food insecure population in America that could benefit from CSFP. SSI payments are very low, so they would greatly benefit from the program.
- Expand food bank commodities and product selection – include additional food options such as fresh or frozen alternatives. Establish a pilot program to try this out.

### **End Hunger for Native Americans/Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians**

- **End the prohibition on dual enrollment in FDPIR & SNAP.**
- **Dedicate a 20% USDA set-aside within each of USDA’s existing program authorities to support Tribal organizations, Tribal governments, Native non-profits, and Native producers.**
  - This will ensure proper access to federal programs with increased access in adequacy of support to help close gaps in Native food security through a variety of programs that support Native food production and nutrition assistance programs.
- **Give Tribal governments the full authority to function as government agencies in administering federal nutrition programs, including TEFAP, CSFP, SNAP**

### **Support Food Banks and the Emergency Food System**

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) helps food banks augment the other food they provide to families in need. TEFAP provided around 600 million meals of the 4 billion meals distributed by the Feeding America network last year. The federal commodities purchased through TEFAP, including fruits, vegetables, meats, and grains, are essential to the efforts of food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other emergency feeding organizations to serve low-income individuals and families facing hunger. Unfortunately, food banks have seen a drop in TEFAP and orders canceled. Below are what food banks in California are reporting:

- **Central California Food Bank:** Right now, CCFB is serving over 350,000 neighbors each month, holding somewhat steady from the service numbers that we were seeing through the height of the pandemic, and we are doing so with a 45 % cut (fiscal year to

date July-April) to food available through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Historically TEFAP provided Central California Food Bank with roughly 25% of the foods that we distributed, but this year, we will likely receive TEFAP food totaling only 15% of the total food we distribute. We simply can't make up this difference on our own (purchasing product or getting product donated), and we rely on TEFAP foods as a reliable source of product to feed hungry neighbors, something that has been a challenge this year with the significant reduction in commodities available through the program. On average, neighbors are receiving significantly less commodities through our over 50 TEFAP distributions as we've had to ration our menu provided to agencies as we navigate the current trends in TEFAP food availability. This is food that our food insecure neighbors have come to rely on as they are planning our monthly food budgets, that we just are unable to provide.

Historically TEFAP has been able to provide a variety of healthy pantry and perishable staples to food insecure neighbors, including fresh produce. These are all items that neighbors need and use as the foundation for healthy meals. But with current pricing fluctuations, transportation and logistics challenges and manufacturing delays, our food bank is seeing roughly half of our monthly loads cancelled. Because of this, our offerings through TEFAP are less comprehensive, and neighbors have less food available to stretch their already tight monthly food budgets. (April 2022)

- **San Francisco Marin-Food Bank:** In the first three quarters of this fiscal year we received 8.9 million pounds of food from the federal government. Last year it was 27 million. How do you begin to find that kind of food, especially in a landscape of inflation and supply chain challenges?

In 2020, almost overnight we saw twice as many people turn to us for support. We wouldn't have been able to meet that need without the support of USDA commodity foods. Now support from the USDA has dried up, but the need in our community is still here – as many as 81% of participants have yet to recover from the financial hardship of COVID-19 (according to a survey of over 7,000 participants). Inflation is only exacerbating that hardship. We are trying to purchase more food, but that is not sustainable – supply chain challenges also make it challenging to purchase food right now.

During the pandemic, TEFAP and USDA commodities were a big part of our distribution, it allowed us to serve our community. Losing it has been a big hit.

- **Improve TEFAP so that food bank shoppers can access more nutritious, culturally responsive food with dignity:**
  - Increase funding for TEFAP
  - Expand the local purchasing, flexible funds to states to provide food bank commodities purchased from local and disadvantaged, including BIPOC,

producers to secure food items that meet local needs and invests in local food economies.

- Enhance centralized purchasing of commodities by incorporating USDA AMS plans for local and regional food systems and building pathways for communities to provide input and feedback on commodities purchased for distribution.
- Make all TEFAP flexibilities permanent: flexibilities permitted during the pandemic increase accessibility and efficiency for clients and reduce administrative barriers for providers. These include waiving the requirement to collect personal information and use other food distribution models like drive-throughs and home delivery by proxies.
- Raise the minimum income eligibility threshold to 250% in order to maximize participation by low-income populations with regards to local needs and costs of living.

### **Address the Root Causes of Hunger**

Hunger and poor health are caused in large part by poverty and lack of opportunity which, in turn, are exacerbated by structural racism. Reducing hunger and improving health requires addressing these root causes. California has a high cost of living and many people are barely making it by living paycheck to paycheck all the while people's income are not keeping up.

[Income is frequently not enough to meet basic needs](#) (on average a family of four requires about \$36,000). As effective as the federal nutrition programs are, they cannot end hunger alone. Additional strong federal investments are needed to address root causes of hunger. This can be achieved by boosting upward mobility by increasing economic mobility, reducing inflation, boosting wages, and reducing poverty.

- "Hunger isn't an absence of food but a symptom of poverty. And to the degree that people don't have enough money to meet their basic needs and for those with chronic needs, receiving food from a local food bank or pantry is simply baked into their household budget." –Community Action Partnership of Orange County Food Bank
- "The Bay Area cost-of-living is high. It's always been high and we probably have a higher percentage of people that live paycheck to paycheck, so given inflation and how people's incomes are not keeping up, with that we're seeing pandemic level highs of usage at our food bank." –Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- "When it comes to hunger are they gonna pay for the electric bill this month or are they gonna pay to put food on the table this month or gas to put in the car to get to work or are they going to skip a meal, that's who we serve." –Food Share of Ventura County

Many recommendations were offered to address the root causes of hunger:

- **Make childcare affordable for all.** There was widespread acknowledgement in our listening sessions that one of the biggest expenses that families with children face when it comes to their income and budgeting is the cost of childcare. We cannot expect parents to be able to seek and maintain stable employment without affordable childcare options.
  - “Childcare needs to be revamped. We can’t expect parents to work if they can’t find affordable childcare.” –Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
  - “We’re seeing a ton of people showing up at our food pantries because their housing is not affordable or they can’t get affordable high-quality child care. Federally subsidized child care would make a huge difference and also subsidized federal housing.” –San Francisco-Marin Food Bank
  
- **Secure better subsidized housing and ensure that everyone has access to affordable and secure housing.**
  - “We need to protect affordable housing. That’s how we get at the root causes of hunger.” –Los Angeles Regional Food Bank.
  - “Housing subsidies, rental subsidies, are huge. We still have an eviction moratorium that’s county wide [in Alameda]. That protection, and our county deploying federal dollars for rental assistance, since most of the people we serve are renters, is a big deal, it’s been really key.” –Alameda County Community Food Bank
  - “Most of our housing problems are because of local housing zoning rules restricting building.” –Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
  - “The average cost of a home in Orange County is over a million dollars... it just costs so much to live here, it leaves less money to meet other basic needs.” –CAP OC food bank
  - The [Housing is Infrastructure Act \(H.R. 4497 – Rep. Waters\)](#) would:
    - Provides \$70 billion to address a decades-long divestment in public housing and the subsequent backlog of capital needs
    - Invests \$45 billion in the Housing Trust Fund to preserve and build more than 200,000 rental homes that low-income households can afford
    - Repeals the Faircloth Amendment of the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998, enabling localities to allow for net increases in public housing
    - Advances equity via a \$2.5 billion investment in fair housing enforcement and a requirement of federal agency grantees to consult fair housing organizations or agencies
  - The [Ending Homelessness Act \(H.R. 4496 – Rep. Waters\)](#) would:
    - Over ten years, provides additional funding until all eligible households can access housing vouchers
    - Over five years, grants \$5 billion to the Housing Trust Fund for affordable rental homes and \$5 billion in grants to build supportive housing
    - Enacts a ban on source-of-income and veteran-status discrimination with funding for its enforcement

- Provides permanent authorization for the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
    - The [Eviction Crisis Act \(S. 2182 – Sen. Bennet\)](#) would:
      - Reduces preventable evictions and mitigates eviction-related consequences, including by creating a national, permanent Emergency Assistance Fund to test, evaluate, and expand proven interventions to help low-income households facing housing instability due to an unexpected economic shock.
      - Improves data and analysis on evictions
      - Improves information on tenant screening reports
- **Increase the minimum wage, and ensure that people have the income they need to have their basic needs met.**
  - “Wage stabilization is important. Providing a Federal minimum wage that is an actual living wage. It could be guaranteed income too. And also housing. There needs to be protected public housing or more robust subsidized housing where you can’t get rejected with housing vouchers. We need to revamp these systems.” –Los Angeles Regional Food Bank.
  - “We need to raise the minimum wage to a livable wage across the nation” –San Luis Obispo Food Bank
  - “Having one flat federal minimum wage that serves does not make sense. It’s not adjusted for regional differences.” - Community Action Partnership of Orange County Food Bank
  - The [Raise the Wage Act \(S. 53 – Sen. Sanders/H.R. 603 – Rep. Scott\)](#) would:
    - Raises the federal minimum wage to \$15 by 2024. Note: The current minimum has been at \$7.25 since 2009.
    - Phases out employers’ ability to pay sub-minimum wages to tipped workers, workers with disabilities, and teenagers.
- **Make the [expanded Child Tax Credit \(CTC\)](#) permanent.** The expansion included in the American Rescue Plan was a great investment. It bolstered efforts to address hunger and its root causes – most notably poverty – by providing a lifeline for families with children to put food on the table; pay housing expenses, debts, and child care; and supplement lost wages due to the pandemic. Unfortunately, Congress failed to extend the CTC and payments stopped. We expect child poverty will rise as a result of this as [families with incomes under \\$35,000 spent some or all of their new monthly payments on basic necessities](#) – housing, food, clothing, and utilities.
  - “We have to fix our tax code. Wealth builds wealth, and this is by design. And we’ll always be grappling with inequity if this is our revenue model. Ending hunger is about the redistribution of power and resources.” –Alameda County Community Food Bank
- **Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit**

- EITC is linked to an [increased likelihood that a child will be born at a healthy birth weight, have higher school test scores, be more likely to go to college and have higher earnings as an adult.](#)
- The EITC for families with children should be increased to address wage stagnation. [Wages for low- and moderate-income families have stagnated over the past several decades, and increasing the EITC would boost those incomes.](#)
- **Review Federal Poverty guidelines** and establish regional measures
  - FPL is not good enough to determine families and people in need. We need to have a regional approach based on income
  - “The fact we are tethered to federal income guidelines and caps on shelter deduction, we are missing people. Compared to someone in Kansas or Kentucky may be in a similar economic citation [as someone in California] but many are excluded by this arbitrary federal income guidelines and the caps on shelter cap deductions.” –Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
  - “Income eligibility needs to be updated to reflect today’s cost of living.” –Community member
- **Protect and strengthen voting rights** - advance equity and access to the ballot box by setting basic national standards to make sure all Americans can cast ballots in the way that works best for them
  - The [Freedom to Vote Act \(S. 2747 - Sen. Klobuchar\)](#) would:
    - Advance equity and access to the ballot box by setting basic national standards to make sure all Americans can cast ballots in the way that works best for them
    - Enacts automatic voter registration and ensures access to online voter registration and same day registration
    - Makes Election Day a public holiday
    - Ensures all voters have access to at least 15 consecutive days of early voting for federal elections
    - Strengthens voter list maintenance standards and sets federal minimum standards on vote by mail and drop boxes
    - Requires provisional ballots to count for all eligible races within a county, regardless of the precinct in which the ballot was cast
    - Restores the right to vote in federal elections for people who have served their time for felony convictions
    - Sets a uniform national standard for states that require identification for in-person voting
    - Expands voting access protections for those with disabilities, Native Americans, the military, overseas voters, and underserved communities
  - The [For the People Act \(S.1 - Sen. Merkley/H.R. 1 - Rep. Sarbanes\)](#) would:
    - Return power to the people by protecting and strengthening voting rights, ending the dominance of big money in politics, ending extreme partisan gerrymandering, and putting in place ethics reforms, among many other voting and election reforms.



The White House Conference on Hunger Nutrition and Health is a vital opportunity to make bold changes and much needed improvements to food access and address the root cause of hunger. It comes at a critical time when we have seen the need for food greatly increase and the gap widened between low and high incomes. The federal government's response to the pandemic shows how effective anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs worked. It offers a great case study for these improvements to be applied permanently. The stories and experiences we heard from community members across the state indicate how these programs are crucial and how they can be improved. A whole government approach is required as we emerge post-pandemic and inflation rises. Government should look at the root causes of hunger and continue to include people with lived experience expertise in addition to federal, state, local and Tribal policymakers.

The roadmap to end hunger needs to include strategies that address the root causes of hunger, improve government income support, expand and strengthen federal nutrition programs, tailor responses and programs to meet the needs of specific populations and ensure families and individuals have access to safe housing and nutritious food.

We look forward to working with you to ensure these priorities are included in the conference in September.

Sincerely,

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