

Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County

AGING IS SOMETHING WE ALL HAVE IN COMMON

March 3, 2020

The Honorable Melissa Hurtado, Chair
Senate Human Services Committee
1020 N Street, Room 521
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for SB 882 (Wiener) – CalFresh

Dear Senator Hurtado:

I am writing on behalf of the Senior Services Coalition and our 40 member organizations in support of SB 882. The bill will simplify the CalFresh application for many older adults and people with disabilities, and eliminate burdensome, ongoing reporting requirements that cause many households to lose nutrition assistance, even though they remain eligible. In addition, the bill will ensure all applicants and participants can complete the application and recertification interview processes by phone, including the required client signature, thereby eliminating a significant barrier for people who have mobility and travel challenges.

More than 4.1 million low-income California households are food insecure. CalFresh, our largest nutrition and anti-poverty program, has the greatest poverty reduction impact among social service programs. However, 3 in 10 eligible households do not have access to CalFresh. Alarming, only 19% of eligible older adults (age 60 or over) are served by the program. The complex and burdensome application and reporting processes contribute to low CalFresh enrollment among older adults. By easing the burden of enrolling and retaining CalFresh benefits, we can ensure older Californians can live hunger free and age in place with dignity.

Last year's expansion of CalFresh eligibility to low-income Californians receiving Social Security Income (SSI) remains a pivotal opportunity to improve CalFresh enrollment, as nearly 500,000 households composed of older adults & people with disabilities have since been enrolled under the state's Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP). By enacting all available ESAP policies that simplify access and enhance retention in CalFresh, we can maximize the opportunity to provide long-sought food assistance to our state's most vulnerable.

We support SB 882 because CalFresh can help older people in our community thrive, if only they can access it. Over 1.7 million Californians miss out on the nutrition benefits of CalFresh. If all those eligible were enrolled, the state would garner nearly \$2 billion more in federal dollars annually, generating over \$3 billion in economic activity annually. No one should go hungry in the great state of California, and it is our collective responsibility to use

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all the tools we have to make it easier for food insecure older adults and people with disabilities to connect and stay connected to CalFresh.

For these reasons, we urge you and the Committee to support SB 882 and thank you for your leadership to improve access to CalFresh.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Peterson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" and "P".

Wendy Peterson
Director, Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County

Cc: Senator Scott Wiener, Member, Senate Human Services Committee
Jared Call, California Food Policy Advocates (sponsor)