

Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County

February 21, 2018

The Honorable Richard Pan
Chair, California Senate Budget Subcommittee 3 – Health & Human Services
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814
via fax: (916) 668-7004

Re: SSI/SSP in the 2015-16 Budget

Dear Senator Pan,

The Senior Services Coalition represents over 40 organizations that provide health and supportive services to over 65,000 seniors in Alameda County. We are writing to urge you and your colleagues on Subcommittee 3 to use the FY 2018-19 Budget to restore funding for SSI/SSP.

Over 1.3 million very vulnerable Californians rely on Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Program income for their survival – over 51,000 of them are Alameda County residents. They are struggling to live on grant levels that are below the federal poverty level, but the Governor's proposed FY 18-19 budget continues to ignore this injustice.

As you know, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a Federal program designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people who have little or no income to meet their most basic needs. The state-funded portion of this program is State Supplemental Payment (SSP).

SSI/SSP Grant Cuts Pushed 1 Million Californians into Poverty: In January 2009 the SSI/SSP grant of \$907 a month was worth 100.5 percent of the federal poverty level for a single individual. Since then, SSP grants were repeatedly cut, and no Cost of Living Adjustments have been provided except for a single 2.76 percent increase in 2016. The cuts have pushed more than 1 million aged, blind and disabled Californians below into poverty, and without COLAs they continue to lose ground. Today, individual SSI/SSP grant levels are \$910 a month, just 90 percent of the federal poverty level.

The cuts to SSI/SSP have been felt statewide. In our county, nonprofit community-based organizations and emergency public services that serve seniors and the poor are swamped with SSI/SSP recipients needing food, shelter, and health care. Among SSI/SSP recipients in Alameda County, the benefit is known as "homeless wages" because recipients find it impossible to cover the most basic costs.

Who Is Impacted by Low SSI/SSP Grants? Of the 1.3 million vulnerable Californians who rely on SSI/SSP, nearly two thirds are blind and disabled individuals, with about one-third of recipients eligible due to age. More than half the caseload is composed of women.

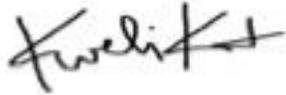
The Magnitude of Cuts to SSI/SSP: For decades California periodically provided an annual COLA on the total SSI/SSP amount until the SSP COLA was repealed in 2009. That year and in following years the state contribution to the SSI/SSP grant for individuals was cut from \$233 per month/per person to the minimum allowed by law – \$156 a month. A small 2.76 percent increase in FY 2016-

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17 brought the state contribution to \$160 per month. Without COLAs, the state reduction continues to be absorbed by people forced to make difficult tradeoffs between food, housing and medicine.

Restore the SSI/SSP Grant Cuts and bring individual grant levels above the federal poverty level. No person on SSI should be living in poverty. The Senior Services Coalition is joining concerned citizens statewide to request that the Legislature restore SSP grant levels.

Sincerely,



Kweli Kitwana
Associate Director of Policy & Advocacy
Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County

CC: Senator Nancy Skinner
Senator Bob Weickowski