



205 S. Broadway, Suite 402
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213.482.8200
www.cfpa.net

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Assemblymember Shirley Weber, PhD
California State Legislature
California State Capitol, Room #3123
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for AB 942 (Weber), Access to Food Choices, Food Security, and Food Safety Act of 2019

Dear Assemblymember Weber:

California Food Policy Advocates is pleased to support AB 942 *“Access to Safe Food Choices and Food Security Act of 2019.”* AB 942 will address food insecurity among some of California’s most vulnerable populations by expanding access to and the availability of hot and prepared food choices through a statewide expansion of the CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program (RPM).

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) is a statewide policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. Drawing on our core understanding that there are many social, political, and economic determinants of poverty, food insecurity, and poor health, CFPA employs a variety of advocacy strategies to fulfill our mission. We believe CalFresh is one of the most powerful anti-hunger tools we have, and the statewide expansion of the RPM will allow the program to serve more people—better.

CalFresh, the state’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), helps more than 4.5 million low-income Californians put food on the table each month.¹ But for some elderly, disabled and homeless people buying, storing, and preparing foods is not a viable option. In these cases, it can be difficult to fully utilize CalFresh benefits. This is also true for people who live in communities that have limited access to grocery stores. These populations are already at higher risk for food insecurity, but the inability to spend CalFresh benefits on hot and prepared foods exacerbates the problem.

Regrettably, California has the lowest participation rates in the country, with only 7 out of 10 eligible households participating in the program.² CalFresh participation rates tend to be even lower among

¹Western Center on Law and Poverty. (2016) *Ending Hunger Through The CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program. A Program Factsheet*, Retrieved from https://wclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Restaurant_Meals_Program_Factsheet_Restaurant_Meals_WCLP.pdf

² United States Department of Agriculture (2012) *Building a Healthy America: A Profile of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*. Retrieved from <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/BuildingHealthyAmerica.pdf>

California's elderly, disabled and homeless people, despite their urgent need.³ AB 942 is a commonsense solution to increasing food access, food security, and food choices through a statewide expansion of the Restaurant Meals Program.

The Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) allows eligible individuals to use their CalFresh benefits to purchase foods that include hot and prepared meals at any qualified participating restaurant, deli counter or store. Currently, only 10 out of the state's 58 counties have opted into RMP.⁴ That means that CalFresh participating Californians who lack access to facilities for food storage and preparation, or are unable to prepare meals for themselves, are unable to purchase a hot or prepared meal simply because **they do not reside** in a county opted into the RMP.

This bill will expand the RMP to all 58 counties in California through a streamlined memorandum of understanding between the CA Department of Social Services and any eligible restaurant in California, regardless of county. AB 942 will improve the efficacy of CalFresh in serving vulnerable populations, increasing food security and making sound public health policy a statewide priority. In 2018, California expanded the RMP through AB 1894 (Weber) to all California State University campuses; including in counties that did not opt-in to participate. AB 942 is a seamless extension of this vital policy change, further expanding food access across California. Such an expansion would not only combat hunger—it would boost local economic activity and statewide tax revenue. For every \$1.00 EBT spent on the RMP, \$1.79 is generated in local economic activity, thus benefiting the community and the entire state.⁵

For these reasons, California Food Policy Advocates urges you to support AB 942 to provide access to food security, food choices and food safety for our most vulnerable Californians.

Sincerely,



Gabrielle Tilley, Policy Advocate

Cc: Tiffany Boyd, tiffany.boyd@asm.ca.gov
Donna Cullinan donna@c@momsrising.org

³Western Center on Law and Poverty. (2016) *Ending Hunger Through The CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program. A Program Factsheet*, Retrieved from https://wclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Restaurant_Meals_Program_Factsheet_Restaurant_Meals_WCLP.pdf.

⁴ Department of Social Services. (2018) *Restaurant Meals Program*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/CalFresh/Restaurant-Meals-Program>

⁵ Western Center on Law and Poverty (2016). *Ending Hunger Through The CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program A Program Factsheet*. Retrieved from https://wclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Restaurant_Meals_Program_Factsheet_Restaurant_Meals_WCLP.pdf