



March 18, 2019

The Honorable Eloise Gómez Reyes, Chairperson  
Assembly Human Services Committee  
1020 N Street, Room 124  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: AB 494 (Berman) – CalFresh Eligibility: Verification of Housing Costs – SUPPORT**

Dear Chairperson Reyes:

On behalf of California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), I write in support of AB 494 (Berman), which would maximize CalFresh benefits for low-income Californians by simplifying the verification of their housing expenses.

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. For over twenty-five years, we have advocated for improved access and participation in the federal nutrition programs, including CalFresh, the state's largest and most effective food assistance program.

In determining eligibility and benefit levels for CalFresh, various income deductions are considered, including the excess shelter cost deduction. Given the high cost of housing in California, it is critical that CalFresh applicants be able to maximize their shelter deduction in order to receive the full monthly CalFresh benefit amount to which they are entitled. In many cases, obtaining verification documents can be difficult and a barrier to access, especially for people who have a shared living arrangement or an informal rental agreement, and for people who don't have reliable and inexpensive access to printers or copiers. Current state guidance allows County Welfare Departments (CWDs) to [elect to require verification of shelter costs](#). A survey of CalFresh outreach staff in February 2019 revealed that county practices and policies regarding verification of shelter costs vary greatly. While some counties accept applicants' self-certified statements of their shelter costs, others require more. This has resulted in unequal access to CalFresh benefits depending on the applicant's county of residence.

Simplifying the verification of shelter costs will be beneficial to all CalFresh applicants, but the expansion of eligibility to those receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) effective June 1, 2019

makes AB 494 especially timely. With [492,000 newly eligible households with members who are elderly or disabled who may apply](#) this summer, unnecessary verification of their housing costs burdens the counties and the applicants and potentially results in incomplete or incorrectly denied applications. Maximizing the use of the shelter deduction for SSI clients is particularly important and impactful since under CalFresh rules the shelter expense deduction is uncapped for households that include an elderly and/or disabled member, resulting in an even larger boost to the household's monthly benefit amount.

AB 494 will ensure that low-income Californians receive the maximum amount of CalFresh benefits for which they are eligible by establishing that CWDs will apply a shelter cost deduction if the costs are verified upon receipt of the minimal verification required by federal law and guidance. For these reasons and more, CFPA supports AB 494 and strongly urges your 'Aye' vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jared M. Call".

Jared Call, Managing Policy Advocate  
California Food Policy Advocates

CC: Office of Assemblymember Marc Berman (Author)