



March 25, 2019

The Honorable Eloise Gomez Reyes
Chair, Assembly Human Services Committee
1020 N Street, Room 124
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: AB 1434 (Kalra): Support

Dear Chair Gomez Reyes:

On behalf of California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), I write to express our strong support for AB 1434 which will help 1.2 million Californians who rely on the Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP). AB 1434 would reinstate the cost-of-living adjustment and require that the state increase its maximum aid payment to an amount that equals 100 percent of the federal poverty level. This legislation helps Californians move out of poverty and live with dignity, particularly the 1.2 million Californians – **seniors and people who experience disabilities who are forced to rely on the SSI program for their basic needs** – who have experienced deep cuts over the past decade with devastating costs to themselves and to our state.

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.

As you know, SSI is a safety net program that provides a very basic income to older adults and people who experience disabilities who have little-to-no other income or resources. **The program is particularly important for women, who make up 66 percent of seniors and 52 percent of individuals with disabilities receiving SSI.** With a rapidly aging population and rising income inequality, California's senior population is becoming larger and poorer.

Local and state governments are literally paying the price of below-poverty SSI grants. As concisely explained by [SSI recipient Ronald Nagby in this short testimonial video](#), our community is forced to rely on expensive public safety, medical and nursing home services that would not be needed if grants covered basic needs. Research continues to document the public cost of services needed due to [homelessness](#) and [hunger](#). Research also shows that if provided increased grants,

those funds would reduce the need for these costly services and in fact would quickly circulate to support our local economies and tax receipts.

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. **Ten years later, individual SSI grants are just \$910.72, only \$4 higher in nominal value than in 2009, and now amount to just 90 percent of the federal poverty level.** A one-time 2.76 percent increase in 2017 has been the [only investment since the Great Recession cuts](#), meaning that every other year SSI recipients experienced an additional cut as grants lost their value to inflation.

The state has made historic progress in reversing the Great Recession deficits, but this has come at the expense of maintaining rock-bottom SSI grants that force hunger, homelessness and inhumane hardship on 1.2 million of our neighbors. Grants are so low that they only cover the cost of a studio apartment in 16 counties – and far less than that in counties as diverse as Los Angeles and San Benito. **Simply put, SSI/SSP recipients do not have sufficient funds to pay for housing, and many are forced into homelessness.** For those who can obtain below-market rent, grants are still insufficient to meet even basic needs for utilities, food, medicine, toiletries, clothing and other necessities that higher income Californians take for granted. The grant cuts and the COLA repeal have pushed recipients into homelessness and hunger, and **they are a significant reason why California has the highest Supplemental Poverty Measure of any state.**

SSI GRANTS NOT ENOUGH TO COVER RENT

“With the way rents are, it’s the rare landlord that will even consider subsidized housing or Section 8. You just can’t get housing.”

Chart shows amount of average individual SSI/SSP income remaining after rent and food costs by region.

Rent alone exceeds income in **27** counties.

Rent + food exceeds income in **52** counties.

Rent + food + healthcare exceeds income in **ALL** counties.



Sources:

Food and healthcare costs sourced from California Elder Economic Security Index. Accessed online at <http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/programs/health-disparities/elder-health.com> on 02/21/2019.

Rent represents Fair Market Rent by county for a 1-bedroom unit for 2019 from HUD.

Maximum SSI/SSP grant for an individual is \$932 effective January 1, 2019. Above graph does not incorporate healthcare, utility or transportation costs.

Prepared by Alameda County Community Food Bank | www.accfb.org

Given the near decade of below-poverty grants, SSI recipients have increasingly relied on non-profit providers to survive because grants are insufficient to last the month. In the case of the emergency food network, many have seen their service to seniors double since the cuts. This increased need

occurs on an essentially permanent basis as the next month's grant falls short and the cycle repeats itself. Providers across the human services sectors are over-capacity as they were built to meet short term gaps.

SSI is now more important than ever to people in every community in California. **We support the policy structure offered in AB 1434 (Kalra) to lift people on SSI to the federal poverty level.**

For these reasons, we support AB 1434 and urge you to take the steps needed to ensure these important changes are made this year.

Sincerely,

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

Jared Call, Managing Policy Advocate
California Food Policy Advocates

CC: Assemblymember Reyes
Assemblymember Mathis
Assemblymember Arambula
Assemblymember Choi
Assemblymember Friedman
Assemblymember Gipson
Assemblymember Maienschein
Assemblymember Stone