



June 4, 2019

Honorable Melissa Hurtado
Chair, Human Services Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 2054 Sacramento, CA 95814

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

On behalf of California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), I write to express our strong support for Assembly Bill 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 level for CalFresh, various income deductions are considered, including the shelter costs 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 CalFresh benefit to which they are entitled. Obtaining verification documents can be difficult, especially for people who have a shared living arrangement, or in an informal rental agreement and for people who don't have access to printers or copiers. Current guidance allows counties to [elect to require verification of shelter costs](#), despite it not being a federal requirement. A survey of CalFresh outreach staff in February 2019 revealed that county practices and policies do vary greatly. While some counties accept self-certified statements of their shelter costs, others require more. This has resulted in unequal access to CalFresh benefits depending on what county the applicant lives in.

The simplification of verifying housing costs will be beneficial to all future CalFresh applicants in California, but the reversal of the SSI "cash-out" policy effective June of 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, or a lower benefit amount to which the applicant is entitled.

AB 494 will ensure that low-income Californians receive the maximum amount of CalFresh benefits for which they are eligible by establishing that CalFresh 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 urges your 'Aye' vote.

Sincerely,

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

Jared Call, Managing Policy Advocate
California Food Policy Advocates

CC: Office of Assemblymember Marc Berman (Author)