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February 14, 2022

The Honorable Joaquin Arambula, M.D.
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #1
1021 O Street, Suite 6240
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: CalFresh Administration Funding

Dear Assembly Member Arambula:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties, I am writing to share our support and co-sponsorship of a budget proposal for CalFresh county administration funding. CSAC is joining the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in respectfully requesting \$60 million General Fund annually until a new budget methodology for county administration is developed. This will help ensure timely eligibility determinations so that individuals and families can gain access to these critical nutrition benefits.

Many Californians are struggling with food insecurity and access to healthy food. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this problem and there has been a significant increase in demand for CalFresh benefits. Specifically, there was a 12 percent increase in CalFresh caseload from 2020-21 to 2021-22. Moreover, recent policy changes have also increased CalFresh caseload. These include expanding eligibility to Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/State Supplemental Payment (SSP) recipients, student eligibility expansion, and increasing access to CalFresh by college students. All of these changes will help more Californians gain access to these needed benefits.

Counties have responsibilities for administering the CalFresh program. County workers conduct eligibility determinations, manage cases, and respond to program inquiries. Unfortunately, the amount of funding provided only covers about 60 percent of county costs and is based on costs as they existed 20 years ago. This outdated methodology has resulted in inadequate staffing levels and longer wait times for access to the program.

In order to respond effectively to the increased demand, counties need increased administration funding. The state is moving forward with updating the budgeting methodology, but that effort has been understandably delayed during the pandemic. While that work is on hold, a funding patch should be provided so that counties can respond effectively to the increased demand and recent program changes. Until a new budgeting methodology is completed, CSAC, in partnership with CWDA and SEIU, requests \$60 million General Fund annually for county administration of the CalFresh program. This funding will strengthen operational capacity and ensure that counties can conduct administration of the CalFresh program in a timely and accurate manner so that Californians can quickly gain access to these important benefits.

Should you have any questions about our position, please do not hesitate to contact me at (916) 698-5751 or jgarrett@counties.org. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justin Garrett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Justin Garrett
Senior Legislative Representative

cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #1
The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
Nicole Vazquez, Consultant, Assembly Budget Committee
Eric Dietz, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Kelsey Castillo, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Ginni Bella Navarre, Legislative Analyst's Office
Kim Johnson, Director, Department of Social Services
Adam Dorsey, Department of Finance
Tam Ma, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Newsom