

An Open Letter to All Members of the California Congressional Delegation

December 13, 2016

Dear Senate and House Members of the California Delegation:

The undersigned California organizations write to thank you for your unwavering support of federal nutrition programs and to urge your resolve to strengthen and protect these programs against any cuts or change in entitlement structure in 2017 and beyond.

There are far too many people in this country struggling with hunger – 42 million, including 13 million children. USDA's Economic Research Service reports that that [12.8 percent of Californians](#) suffer from food insecurity. Many of these people turn to government and private programs to prevent hunger, but our local food pantries and congregate meal programs report they are already at capacity and will be unable to respond adequately to federal cuts.

While this high incidence of hunger is disgraceful, it would be even worse by far were it not for the nation's profoundly successful and cost-effective national anti-hunger safety-net programs: The [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#), known as [CalFresh in California](#); the [National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs](#); the [Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#) that provides nutrition in child care, adult care, afterschool snack and supper programs; Summer Food programs; The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for [Women, Infant and Children \(WIC\)](#); [Elderly Adult Feeding Programs](#) and the [Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program \(TEFAP\)](#).

Effective Federal Anti-Hunger Programs Should Be Strengthened

Federal anti-hunger programs like the National School Lunch Program and SNAP are essential, not only to prevent hunger and some of the worst outcomes of poverty, but also for communities and retailers who depend on shoppers paying with SNAP when their income falls short. Whatever the fine print, slashing our anti-hunger safety net would be devastating for California.

- Since [every \\$1 billion in SNAP benefits creates at least 10,000 jobs](#), benefit erosion and loss of entitlement from restructuring SNAP would significantly impact jobs in the farming and retail industries in the California.
- Nutrition and health safety net programs protect millions of Californians from the long-lasting harm of poverty. These programs largely serve working families and are the most effective tools at preventing deep poverty. Undermining federal protections against the long arm of deep poverty is dangerous.
- Federal anti-hunger programs are most important during economic downturns, [a lesson we learned during the Great Recession](#). Undermining the federal right to anti-hunger benefits weakens the ability of the programs to respond to recessionary times.

House Leadership has Supported Restructuring that Would Be Devastating for California

This past summer, the United States House Speaker Paul Ryan [unveiled his long-awaited economic plan that will include several policies posited to address poverty](#). While this plan did not describe many

policy details, Speaker Ryan's previous plans and statements, including several made during his [Poverty Summit held last summer](#), provide alarming context. The Speaker's 2014 proposal [for block granting \(sometimes referred to as flexible spending\) Medicare and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) would have cut \$1 trillion from those programs over 10 years. Recently, in the [House Child Nutrition Reauthorization](#), he proposed removing national entitlement to and protections against discrimination in the National School Lunch Program. These programs support the health and well-being of millions of Californians, and any move to change the entitlement structure would be devastating for families who rely on these benefits to make ends meet and to our state's economy.

History Shows that Block Grants Will Block Opportunity to Exit Poverty

2016 marks the 20th anniversary of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (PROWA), which infamously 'ended welfare as we knew it' and [Aid to Families with Dependent Children \(AFDC\)](#) protections against deep poverty for America's children. Instead, PROWA established block grants through the Temporary Aid to Needy Family (TANF) program, known as CalWORKs in California. In our state and throughout the country, this structural change has had [devastating long-term consequences for children](#) growing up in families with little or no cash income to meet basic needs. Even those who played a central role in crafting PROWA have recently [suggested that its impact on children and families has been too harsh](#).

This is why we are asking California's Congressional Delegation to act to strengthen, not weaken, national anti-hunger programs and to oppose block granting and any form of structural change in these programs.

For more information about this statement, contact: Jessica Bartholow, Western Center on Law and Poverty at jbartholow@wclp.org; Andrew Cheyne, California Association of Food Banks at andrew@cafoodbanks.org; Kevin Aslanian at the Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations at kevin.aslanian@ccwro.org; or, Elyse Homel Vitale, California Food Policy Advocates at elyse@cfpa.net.

Organizational Signatures