An Open Letter to All Members of the California Congressional Delegation
January 18, 2017

Dear Senate and House Members of the California Delegation:

The 130 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 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.
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Organizational Signatures continued

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 many states across 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. To see the National Anti-Hunger Organizations (NAHO) statement and add your organization’s name to the National letter to Congress being circulated by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), go here: http://org2.salsalabs.com/o/5118/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=23994

130 Organizational Signatures
2-1-1 Orange County
Agricultural Institute of Marin
Alameda County Community Food Bank
Alameda Food Bank
Asian Pacific American Community Center
Bay Area Community Services
Bayview Senior Services
Berkeley Food Pantry
Organizational Signatures continued
California Association of Food Banks
California Child Care Resource & Referral NETWORK
California Food Policy Advocates
California Hunger Action Coalition
California League of Food Processors
California Partnership
California State Student Association
California WIC Association
Children Now
Children's Defense Fund-California
City Heights Community Development Corporation
Clinica Sierra Vista
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Inc.
Community Action Marin
Community Action Partnership of Kern (CAPK)
Community Action Partnership of Orange County
Community Services Unlimited Inc.
County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA)
Disability Rights California
Donaldina Cameron House
East Bay Agency for Children
East Oakland Boxing Association
Ecology Center
Emeryville Citizens Assistance Program - ECAP
Ensuring Opportunity Campaign to End Poverty in Contra Costa County
Episcopal Community Services of San Francisco
Evergreen Child Care, Inc.
Family Economic Security Partnership
Feeding America Riverside|San Bernardino
Feeding San Diego
Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo County
Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
Food Empowerment Project
Food for People, Inc.
Fresh Approach Inc.
Fresno Hunger Count
Fresno Metro Ministry
GLIDE Foundation
Golden Gate Restaurant Association
Good Samaritan Family Resource Center, Inc.
Grace Baptist Church Oakland/Bay Area
Greater Faith Missionary Baptist Church-Pittsburg, CA
Groceryships
Organizational Signatures continued
HealthRIGHT 360 (includes Lyon-Martin Health Services)
Healthy Eating Active Living San Luis Obispo County (HEAL SLO)
Help Me Help You
Hillcrest Congregational Church, UCC
Humboldt County Access Resource Center (HCAR)
Humboldt State University
Hunger Action Los Angeles
Imperial Valley Food Bank
Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank
Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles
Jewish Family Service of San Diego
Jewish Vocational Services (JVS - Work Transforms Lives)
La Maestra Community Health Centers
La Raza Community Resource Center
Leah’s Pantry
Loaves and Fishes of Contra Costa
Locally Delicious
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
Lundberg Family Farms
Lutheran Social Services of Northern of California
Mandela MarketPlace
Marin Community and School Garden Network
Marin Food Policy Council
Maternal and Child Health Access
Meals on Wheels California
Meals on Wheels San Francisco
Mendocino Food and Nutrition Program Inc./The Fort Bragg Food Bank
Merced County Food Bank
Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA)
Mission Neighborhood Centers, Inc.
Multi Faith Action Coalition of Contra Costa
National Council of Jewish Women CA
Nutrition and Fitness Collaborative of the Central Coast/ Central Coast Healthy Food Access Committee
Oakland Catholic Worker
Ocean Beach Emergency Food Inc.
Operation Dignity
Opportunity Junction
Orange County Food Access Coalition (OC Food Access Coalition)
Orange County Food Bank
Parent Voices California
Personal Assistance Services Council of Los Angeles County
Presbyterian Chuch (USA)
Organizational Signatures continued
Project Angel Food
Proyecto Jardin
Public Interest Law Project
Redwood Community Health Coalition
Redwood Empire Food Bank
River City Food Bank
Rubicon Programs
Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services
Sacramento Food Policy Council
Sacramento Hunger Coalition
Safe Passages
San Francisco and Marin Food Bank
San Francisco Quaker Food Pantry
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County
Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties
Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County
Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County
Slow Food California
Southeast Asian Community Center (SEACC)
SparkPoint Marin
St. Andrew Presbyterian Church-Marin City
St. Anthony Foundation
St. James Food Pantry-Oakland
St. Mary's Center
TCV Food Bank (Tri-City Volunteers)
Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation (TNDC)
The Women's Building
Treasure Island Homeless Development Initiative (TIHDI)
Vietnamese American Community Center of the East Bay
Village Community Resource Center
Voices for Progress Education Fund
Voices for Progress, California Office
Western Center on Law & Poverty
Westside Food Bank
Willits Community Services and Food Bank
Women Organizing Resources, Knowledge and Services (WORKS)
Yolo Food Bank
Youth Leadership Institute