

Senate Bill 600

CalFresh Minimum Benefit Adequacy Act of 2023 Senator Caroline Menjivar (D – San Fernando Valley)

SUMMARY

SB 600 would require the Department of Social Services (DSS) to establish the CalFresh Minimum Nutrition Benefit (MNB) to provide additional CalFresh nutrition benefits to ensure all CalFresh households receive a minimum monthly benefit of \$50. This increase would reflect California's high cost of living and inadequate federal benefit levels.

PROBLEM

Currently, the monthly Minimum Nutrition Benefit for CalFresh households of 1 to 2 people is \$23 and needs to be adjusted to support the rising costs of groceries. The Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) Report released in 2021 estimates that the average cost of groceries for a family of 2 is \$417.79 a month. With inflation and the high cost of living, CalFresh recipients would need more than the minimum nutritional benefit to sustain a one-person household. In California, families would run out of benefits in less than four days with the current allotment.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the state was able to, through funds from the Federal Government, administer Emergency Allotments that averaged around \$262 a month. The Federal Government will be ending these emergency allotments in February of this year, and families will receive their last emergency allotment in March. CalFresh recipients will then see a severe decrease in their CalFresh benefits from \$262 to \$23. CalFresh recipients and families are still experiencing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, on top of inflation, job loss, and income instability. Other states, like New Jersey, have responded to the looming hunger cliff by lifting their MNBs to \$95 a month.¹

BACKGROUND

CalFresh, federally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is a Safety net program that provides low-income households with monthly benefits to purchase food. The California Department of Social Services (DSS) oversees the CalFresh program, and each county is responsible for local administration. Eligibility is determined

by household size, income, housing costs, and dependent/childcare costs. If a participant is over 60, medical expenses can qualify as deductions to income. Over 5 million Californians currently receive SNAP (CalFresh) nutrition assistance.² A 2022 report from the Public Policy Institute of California found that "Roughly half of California's young children participate in CalFresh by the time they turn six."³

CalFresh is the state's most effective anti-hunger program, supporting the health of our low-income communities while also creating jobs and benefiting our state's food economy. When individuals and families are able to obtain this assistance they don't have to stress about when their next meal will be and can instead focus on their rent and utilities.

Safety net programs such as CalFresh help families stabilize their income and lift Californians out of poverty. The Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), set by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), determines the minimum allotment of SNAP (CalFresh) benefits.⁴ In 2021, the Thrifty Food Plan was adjusted beyond inflation for the first time in over 45 years. However, the high cost of living in states like California are not considered when determining the TFP.⁵ States like California that wish to increase this minimum nutritional benefit, must establish an MNB program, as SB 600 sets out to do, and appropriate state funds to lift the current federal minimum nutrition benefit from \$23 to \$50. The White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health also stated the need to increase food access and affordability to address food insecurity and the looming hunger cliff. SB 600 aligns with the administration's call by addressing the federal cut in food snap benefits for Californians.

SOLUTION

SB 600 would require DSS, with appropriate state funds, to establish the CalFresh Minimum Nutrition Benefit (MNB), to provide additional CalFresh nutrition benefits to ensure all CalFresh households receive a minimum benefit of \$50 a month. This bill will help ensure our most vulnerable households do not go hungry.

¹ <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/njsnap/emergency/covid19/>

² <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/california.department.of.social.services/viz/CFdash-board-PUBLIC/Home?publish=yes>

³ <https://www.ppic.org/?show-pdf=true&docraptor=true&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ppic.org%2Fpublication%2Fthe-role-of-cal-fresh-in-stabilizing-family-incomes%2F>

⁴ <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/TFP2021.pdf>

⁵ https://dpbh.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/dpbhngov/content/Programs/OFS/GCFS_Meetings/2022/What%20is%20the%20Thrifty%20Food%20Plan%20Presentation.pdf

STATUS

Introduced February 15, 2023

SUPPORT

California Association of Food Banks (Co-Sponsor)
Nourish California (Co-Sponsor)
GRACE/End Child Poverty CA (Co-Sponsor)

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