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CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF FOOD BANKS



California Farm Bureau

TOMKAT RANCH



NRDC NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL



Nourish California



Friends of the Earth



February 1st, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
State Capitol, Room 5094
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted via electronic mail

RE: Additional Funding for School Meal Service As COVID-19 Continues

Dear Senator Skinner and Assemblymember Ting,

First, thank you for supporting funding for school nutrition programs this summer to alleviate budgets strained by COVID-19 response. This critical funding alongside the USDA waivers has helped ensure that school children in California have access to free, nutritious meals while schools continue to be closed. We appreciate your leadership in helping to alleviate child hunger at a time when families cannot afford to pay for food.

Unfortunately, the state funding allocated for school nutrition expired at the start of the school year, and no new funding was included in the Governor's January budget. This funding is especially important now, given the dire budget forecasts projected by [the School Nutrition Association \(SNA\)'s nationwide survey with school food service directors in September 2020 about their budget deficits](#). Here are the top-level findings from their California results which include responses from **124 California School Districts**:

- **64% of school districts experienced financial losses in SY 2019-20.** An additional 14% were not sure if they had a financial loss, leaving just 23% of districts that did not experience losses.
- **84% of school districts anticipate a net loss in SY 2020-21.** An additional 6.5% are not sure. The majority of these districts do not think that their reserves will be able cover these losses.

In a similar survey conducted by the Center for Ecoliteracy, California school nutrition directors again reported that their deficits are projected to be much worse by the end of the 2020–21 school year than they were at the close of the 2019–20 school year. If we use these data — from school districts that serve 5% of California's students — to project financial impacts across the state, *the Center for Ecoliteracy estimates that [California's school food programs could be facing as much as \\$558 million of debt by the end of the 2020–2021 school year](#).*

This coalition of supporters is writing to respectfully request additional funding in the 2021-22 California state budget to provide more flexible financial resources to all public school nutrition departments that face additional costs in feeding students during the pandemic. It is imperative that we pursue multiple avenues to help prevent child hunger at a time when families are facing economic hardship, and when marked inequities in nutrition and education are growing more acute. The approaches to addressing our explosive hunger crisis must be many, and multi-pronged. As a coalition, we support increasing access to school meals for as many California kids as possible during the COVID-19 crisis, and a part of that is ensuring that schools have the financial resources to continue to serve nutritious meals to students.

Student nutrition has tremendous effects on educational achievement and quality of life outcomes later in life. Lack of access to healthy food is exacerbated by socio-economic status and most prevalent in low-income communities of color.¹ Providing financial resources to school nutrition programs ensures schools have the opportunity to play a vital role in keeping their communities fed, including traditionally under-resourced children.

It is unlikely that most school districts in California will return to in-person instruction in the first several months of 2021, so without additional support, school food service departments will have to draw further on general funds, reduce the quality of meals, and consider layoffs of school food service workers next school year. Supplemental funding is critical to help cover the additional costs and losses of revenue associated with COVID-19 school food service, and will aid public school districts in continuing to safely serve free meals to hungry students during the pandemic.

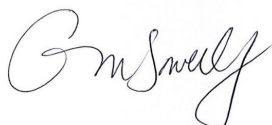
¹ http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



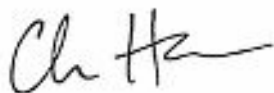
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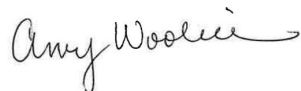
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The Honorable Tony Thurmond
California Superintendent of Public Instruction

The Honorable Toni Atkins
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The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker of the California Assembly

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