



February 25, 2021

The Honorable Melissa Hurtado
Chair, Senate Human Services Committee
State Capitol, Room 3070
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for SB 107 (Wiener): CalFresh—Simpler for Seniors

Dear Chairperson Hurtado:

On behalf of [Health Center Partners of Southern California](#) and its 17-member primary care organizations, which together serve more than 917,000 patients each year, for 3.9 million patient visits each year, at 160 practice sites across San Diego, Riverside, and Imperial counties, **I strongly support SB 107 (Wiener) which would simplify the CalFresh application for many older adults and people with disabilities and ensure all applicants and participants can complete the application and recertification interview processes by phone, including the required client signature.**

COVID-19 is exacerbating already high levels of hunger and hardship, particularly among older adults and people with disabilities. Despite federal and state interventions, the most recent data show that overall food insecurity has spiked to more than 25 percent of California households – [that’s some 10 million people](#), and 2.5 times higher than [before the COVID-19 crisis began](#). **To better connect older adults with ongoing federal food assistance, it is critical that we exercise every available option to simplify access to CalFresh.**

The current CalFresh application — the CF 285 — is a complex, 18-page document. It can be challenging and intimidating for anyone, particularly for older adults and persons with physical or developmental disabilities. Though I applaud the success of online application portals like GetCalFresh.org, many **stakeholders have shared that older adults want the option of completing a paper application**. Many low-income older adults lack reliable Internet access and/or do not feel comfortable sharing personal information online.

SB 107 would enact recommendations in the state’s [Master Plan for Aging](#), specifically Goal 5 (Affordable Aging), Strategy C (Protection from Hunger and Poverty), Initiative 131: “Continue to streamline older and disabled adult enrollment, renewal, and online shopping in CalFresh, as allowable.”

SB 107 would further improve access to CalFresh by ensuring all applicants and participants can **complete the application and reporting processes by phone**, including the required client signature. Pandemic conditions have forced the two-thirds of California counties without telephonic/electronic



signature capacity to implement emergency workarounds to provide remote services to communities facing unprecedented need. Those workarounds are possible due to expanded flexibility provided

through temporary federal waivers, now being approved by [USDA Food and Nutrition Service on a temporary, month-by-month basis](#).

While telephonic/electronic signature is a critically important capacity for county welfare departments during COVID-19, this has been a long-standing need for clients with busy, unpredictable schedules and those without reliable Internet access. The recent expansion of CalFresh eligibility to SSI recipients was facilitated by a multi-stakeholder process with counties, CDSS and advocates. That process produced concrete recommendations to improve county business processes to better serve the older adult and disabled populations. **The [number one recommendation](#) was to allow for telephonic/electronic signature.**

Implementing a user-centered, simplified CalFresh application and ensuring full telephonic access are critical steps to address hunger in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. **Now is the time to make permanent improvements to simplify CalFresh access and close the participation gap.** No one should go hungry in the great agricultural state of California. Older adult and disabled households deserve to live with dignity, free from hunger.

For these reasons, I strongly support SB 107 and urge your ‘aye’ vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Henry N. Tuttle".

Henry N. Tuttle
President and CEO

cc: Senator Scott Wiener (SD-11)
Jared Call, Nourish California (sponsor)
Blanca E. Castro-Paszinski, AARP California (co-sponsor)
Andrew Cheyne, California Association of Food Banks (co-sponsor)
Meg Davidson, San Francisco-Marin Food Bank (co-sponsor)
Members of the Board, San Diegans for Health Care Coverage
Members of the HCP Board

[Health Center Partners of Southern California](#), a family of companies, includes a 17-membership organization of federally qualified health centers, Indian Health Services Organizations, both urban and sovereign, and Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, collectively serving 917,000 patients each year, for 3.9 million patient visits each year, at 160 practice sites across San Diego, Riverside seventh largest provider group in the region. [Read our latest Impact Report.](#)