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# California State Senate

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CHAIR  
BUDGET & FISCAL REVIEW  
JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET

COMMITTEES  
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY  
HOUSING  
PUBLIC SAFETY  
TRANSPORTATION

September 14, 2021

Honorable James P. McGovern  
Chairman, Rules Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-312 The U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member, Rules Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2207 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Ending Child Hunger

Dear Chairman McGovern and Ranking Member Cole:

It was an honor to host you, Chairman McGovern, in California State Senate District 9 last month to discuss strategies for ending hunger in the Golden State and beyond. I am writing now to share with you both my hopes that Congress will take bold action to address child hunger this year.

As you are more than aware, the rise in child hunger during the COVID-19 pandemic has been alarming. Before the pandemic, less than 1% of households indicated that their children experienced “very low food security.” However, this grew to nearly 16% by March of 2020 and remained stubbornly high until state and federal COVID-19 cash and food relief began last fall. Even with these improvements, hunger continues to impact Black and Latino low-income households with children at very high rates, [causing short-term harm](#) and endangering their future health and capabilities.

Due to our size, California has more hungry children than any other state. We also have more opportunities to address this problem, because of our state’s healthy revenues and the size of our food economy. But the truth is, no matter how much we do to combat child hunger, we will not be truly successful if the federal government does not prioritize this fight. As you go about the work of ameliorating child hunger, I offer you these thoughts, informed by our experience on the West Coast.

First, no matter how strong child nutrition programs are, they are not as powerful at addressing child hunger as are [fair wage and family leave policies](#). So at the top of the federal agenda to end hunger should be increasing the minimum wage, creating national paid sick and paid family leave laws, and establishing national universal childcare.

In addition to wage and worker protections, direct cash and food assistance to families with children, like the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), the monthly Child Tax Credit (CTC), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are essential. If we are going to end hunger, making

CTC permanent and ensuring monthly CTC, TANF & SNAP benefits reach every child who is income eligible must be achieved — and the amount of benefits must be increased. This is why I was so happy to see that [just last month](#) benefit amounts in SNAP were permanently increased via the [updating of the Thrifty Food Plan](#). SNAP benefits previously were 21% too low to meet basic dietary needs. The following changes to SNAP would further the goal of preventing hunger among families with children:

- Pass legislation, as proposed by the [Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2021 sponsored by Senator Gillibrand and Representative Alma Adams](#) to remove the cap on the SNAP Excess Shelter Cost Deduction that is currently limited to \$586. This negatively impacts larger households and, as a result, families with children. It is most harmful in states like California and the Chairman’s home state, Massachusetts, which have higher housing costs.
- Make permanent and nationwide the SNAP Categorical Eligibility Option.
- End the [“complementary program sanction” on SNAP benefits for families enrolled in TANF](#). This sanction has protections for families with a pregnant person or a younger child, but children over 12 years of age need to eat, too; in fact, they need to eat more, and their health and wellbeing should not be undermined by the work-or-go-hungry policies of the past.
- [Remove the SNAP 5-year waiting period for legal permanent resident adults](#) and expand the definition of legally present immigrants who can qualify for SNAP and other federal benefits (e.g. DACA, U Visa, and Temporary Protected Status and beyond).
- Allow states the option to build on these programs by offering more local help, like housing assistance and monthly state tax credits, without requiring them to be counted as income in SNAP (as per post-2013 interpretation 7 CFR § 273.9(vii)).

With stronger federal family safety-net programs, school and community-based meal programs can serve as the “last mile” in child hunger prevention. To strengthen their ability to do so, I am hopeful that federal policy makers will:

- Extend Universal School Meals [beyond the 2020-2021 school year](#) so that every child is made permanently eligible for two free school meals per day through the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) without a means-test. As you know, [California and Maine recently enacted permanent universal meals](#) and several state legislatures have introduced legislation to do the same. Federal lawmakers should follow suit.
- Enact the Biden-Harris Administration’s American Families Plan nationwide Summer EBT and ensure that [EBT benefits provided to all low-income children during all breaks as well as unanticipated disasters](#) (as proposed by [my bill Senate Bill 364](#), [H.R. 3519 Levin \(D-CA\)](#) & [S. 1831 Murray \(D-WA\)](#)).
- Immediately use all authority to stop collection and expunge all school meal debt during the COVID-19 public health crisis as was proposed by the [Suspend School Meal Debt Act introduced by Representatives Omar \(D-MN\) and Holland \(D-NM\)](#).

- Immediately restore the ability for parents and caregivers to submit a school meal application without a Social Security number.
- Until School Meals are federally universal, take bold action to undo the harm of the current pay-or-go-hungry models, including school lunch shaming, by clarifying that retroactive approval of school meals for children whose parents can prove that they were eligible prior to their application is allowed. Also, expand free meal eligibility to apply to children currently only eligible for reduced price and revise the Unpaid School Meal guidance detailed in this [Report to Congress](#) required by the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act ([Public Law 111-296](#)) to [ban lunch shaming](#) practices altogether, as [California](#), [Washington](#), Oregon and other states in the West have done.
- Allow for schools and school districts that apply for a permanent waiver of congregate meal rules on days when school is let out early, so that schools can send a grab-and-go lunch for remaining meals.
- Simplify rules that [would allow younger siblings to eat at elementary school breakfast programs](#).
- Minimize National School Lunch Program (NSLP) paperwork burdens by allowing for statewide Community Eligibility Provisions (CEP) expanding and making permanent the use of direct certification of children using various means-tested programs, as were proposed in [the House Education and Labor Committee hearing and Committee Print](#) completed last week to comply with the Reconciliation Order.

While these endeavors may seem expensive, we all know that it simply comes down to priorities. We have the means to address hunger in America, [if we choose to do so](#). In California, we have benefited greatly by instituting a higher income tax on wealthy individuals, and much of the advances we are making now are a result of those changes in state tax law. I was thrilled to see [President Biden and House Democrats announce support](#) for a similar proposal at the federal level and believe that the resources it would produce could go a long way toward ending child poverty and hunger with the right planning and legislative action. But even if higher taxes are not achieved, other policy decisions could help to fund what should be one of our nation's top priorities: preventing harm to children who live within our borders.

In closing, I am truly grateful for your leadership in addressing, and seeking to end, hunger in America. It is shameful that we have yet to achieve this important milestone as a nation, even though we have more than enough resources to do so. I hope you will consider these suggestions, and I look forward to participating in the next steps necessary to achieve them and the many more I'm sure will surface in the several roundtables and hearings you are conducting on the topic. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me through my chief of staff, Jessica Bartholow, at [Jessica.Bartholow@Sen.Ca.Gov](mailto:Jessica.Bartholow@Sen.Ca.Gov).

Sincerely,



Nancy Skinner  
State Senator, District 9