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May 26, 2020

The Honorable Holly Mitchell
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted via electronic mail

RE: Additional Disaster Response Funding for COVID-19 Emergency School Meals - SUPPORT

Dear Chairwoman Mitchell,

We now face the economic and public health fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. Thanks in no small part to the legislature's and the Governor's leadership, California has managed to flatten the curve and has entered into the initial stages of reopening our economy. However, the state now faces an unprecedented budget deficit, unemployment that rivals the Great Depression, and rising poverty. As a result, difficult decisions are being made in order to begin recovering from the virus, maintain our essential state functions, and continue to support those most in need. Despite these cutbacks, an adequate pandemic response must include state funding that gives our most under-resourced communities reliable and safe access to food.

We are writing to respectfully request additional funding in the 2020-21 California budget to provide flexible resources to all public school nutrition departments that face additional costs in feeding students during this public health crisis. It is imperative that we help prevent child hunger at a time when

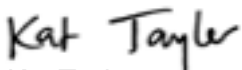
their families cannot afford to pay for food. As a coalition, we support increasing access to school meals for as many California kids as possible during the COVID-19 crisis. This additional funding can help keep school meal programs open, leveraging up to \$2 billion of federal reimbursements that could be lost each year if school nutrition programs are serving fewer students or are forced to close.

During this time, access to food is one of the most basic human needs that must be met. Demand for food aid has increased [eightfold](#) in some areas amid this crisis, and lines of cars extend for miles from school sites and food banks, which are scrambling to meet the explosion in need. **Schools have stepped up to provide meals to students in need, but current state funding does not account for the increased costs of feeding students during COVID-19 and the subsequent recovery. The pandemic has introduced new challenges and growing budget deficits for many school nutrition service departments as they continue to pay their staff, lose sources of revenue, and lack adequate personal protective equipment. Without intervention, school districts may have to choose between balanced budgets and providing meals for children who need it most.**

This funding could be used to provide an additional state reimbursement for school meals, as well as personal protective equipment and training for school food service workers. These dollars are critical for helping students in need, keeping communities safe, and stimulating a struggling agricultural economy by encouraging purchases of California-grown food. Without adequate funding and formal safety plans, many schools could be forced to discontinue emergency meal service if an employee or volunteer tests positive, leaving critical federal dollars on the table.

The Federal Reserve identified that 40% of Americans making less than \$40,000 a year have lost their jobs. Millions of Californians were living paycheck-to-paycheck — such as those working for restaurants, retail, and the ride-share industry — and they are seeing their incomes and livelihoods decimated due to COVID-19. **The current budget deficit means difficult decisions will have to be made, but choosing to keep the children of our state from going hungry should not be one of them.** 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. We strongly support the inclusion of additional disaster response funding for school nutrition in the 2020-21 budget enacted in June.

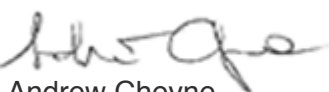
Respectfully,



Kat Taylor
Principal
The Office of Kat Taylor



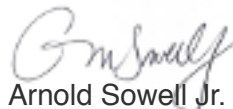
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¹ http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf



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CC:

The Honorable Jim Nielsen
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The Honorable Jim Beall
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee

The Honorable Anna M. Caballero
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee

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