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April 14, 2014

The Honorable Cheryl Brown
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Tony Thurmond
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for AB 474 (Brown and Thurmond)

Dear Assemblymember Brown and Assemblymember Thurmond,

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) supports AB 474 which would increase Supplemental Security Income (SSI) grants for individuals to 112 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or \$1,099 a month in current dollars.

CPFA is a statewide, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. Throughout our more than 20 years of experience, we've worked to achieve a healthy and food secure California. Improving the adequacy of SSI benefits will help prevent hunger among SSI recipients who for years have experienced benefit cuts and have been denied Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA).

In January 2007, the SSI/SSP grant of \$856 a month was worth 100.4 percent of FPL for a single individual. Since that date, the SSP grant has been repeatedly cut and no COLA has been provided. In January 2015, the SSI/SSP grant was worth just 90.2 percent of FPL. The grant cuts and repeal of the COLA pushed many of the 1.3 million blind, aged and disabled Californians who rely on the program well into poverty. This is one of the most significant reasons that California has seen its poverty rate skyrocket and why we have the highest percentage of people in poverty of any state in the country.

Due to these cuts, we're seeing an increase in SSI recipients' use of emergency food programs. In addition, many seniors are looking for additional assistance through community based organizations that serve the aged. What's more, with the median rent of a studio apartment not below 50 percent of the value of an individual benefit in any county and more than the entire benefit value in 15 counties (according to the California Budget and Policy Center), many SSI recipients are becoming homeless. When people are homeless and hungry they are more likely to require expensive services, such as medical and nursing home services that could have been prevented by providing adequate SSI benefits.

While we fully support AB 474 and the considerable progress it makes toward improving the adequacy of SSI benefits, we encourage the authors and the Legislature to go a step further and consider increasing SSI grants for couples in addition to individuals. No person on SSI should be condemned to poverty. It's time to reverse the damage done over the last eight years.

For these reasons, CFPA supports AB 474 and thanks you both for introducing this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexis Fernández". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Alexis Fernández
Director of Legislation
California Food Policy Advocates