



July 20, 2015

To the esteemed members of the National Commission on Hunger,

We know that every county in the US is challenged by hunger. Nationally, one in seven people is at risk of food insecurity. But here in San Francisco and Marin counties, one in four people is at risk of not having the food they need to stay healthy and nourished.

High unemployment and the lingering effects of the recession have pushed record numbers of people in our service area to the point of hunger. While government safety net programs are stretched thin with budget cuts, we've scaled up. This year we will distribute 47 million pounds of food, which will nourish 225,000 people through our 450 community partners all over San Francisco and Marin.

While food banks all over the country respond to crippling levels of poverty and food insecurity, we know that CalFresh remains to be our nation's first line of defense against hunger. In California, 4.2 million people are supported by the program – giving them stability in being able to buy groceries for themselves and their families.

Unfortunately, millions of Californians who qualify for the program are not receiving benefits. In fact, California is the worst performing state when it comes to enrolling eligible people. Less than 60% of eligible Californians are receiving benefits, compared to some of the best performing states like Oregon and Washington where close to 100% of eligible people are enrolled. In addition to very low enrollment in California, we have one of the highest administrative costs per case – making our program very expensive to operate.

There are a few things that we think should be improved in order to make the CalFresh program more streamlined and accessible for those who qualify:

- **Make it easier for people to enroll in the programs that they are eligible for.** For many families who are living on limited resources, a patchwork of programs is what keeps their families stable. Many families in our service area of San Francisco and Marin rely on a combination of CalFresh, free and reduced school meals, WIC, Medi-Cal, and other supportive programs in order to meet their basic needs. We think that when someone applies for one program, their application information should be easily accessible by other programs, so that families don't have to spend time applying for many programs that require the same information.
- **Streamline and simplify program infrastructure.** Cumbersome and antiquated technology should not be the reason why families don't get the resources they need to stay healthy and nourished. We need programs at the local, state and national level to be modernized, so that the eligibility process is always quick, consistent and connected.
- **Invest more in SNAP.** CalFresh – as we call it in California – is a vital resource, allowing low-income families to shop for groceries. It's our most effective way of getting resources into the



hands of families and households who need support in buying groceries consistently. We need to invest more in SNAP at the national level so that everyone can rely on being able to purchase healthy food regardless of income.

The National Commission on Hunger is in a unique position to be able to shape the direction of our national response to hunger, and we are thrilled to be able to participate and share our ideas. We look forward to hearing the Commission's recommendations to Congress in October.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Teri M. Olle".

Teri Olle
Director of Policy and Advocacy
SF-Marin Food Bank
(415)282-1900 x230
tolle@sfmfoodbank.org