



3/26/2025

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O St, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Executive Order N-1-25: Ensuring Consumer Choice in CalFresh

Dear Governor Newsom,

We are deeply grateful for the historic and nation-leading anti-hunger and nutrition policies and investments made under your administration to ensure all Californians have the food they need to thrive. CalFresh is our state's biggest anti-hunger program, [now enrolling over 5.5 million Californians](#), totaling \$1 billion in benefits per month.

Our members proudly deliver the program on the ground, to ensure that families across the state have access to food to purchase according to their needs. With the latest data showing that [81% of eligible Californians are enrolled in the program](#) - the highest ever - it is clear that this program has never been more vital for the [1 in 5 households experiencing hunger today](#).

[Your January 3 Executive Order to build on California's leadership in ensuring healthy food access](#) is a welcome opportunity for our members. Grocery stores are a cornerstone of this public-private partnership, which allows people to use their CalFresh benefits to purchase foods that best meet their individual circumstances. One of the most essential elements of this program is the way it supports people in purchasing groceries with dignity, supporting each shopper in their unique and complex food choices. The dietary needs of CalFresh recipients are diverse, and no one diet would be appropriate for all participants. For instance, a cancer patient struggling to gain weight doesn't have the same needs as a child fighting diabetes.

Restricting eligible items to those approved by the state would significantly drive-up operational costs and create insurmountable red tape with no meaningful public health outcome to show in return. The government would need to categorize more than 600,000 products and update the list each year with thousands more products. Our front-line staff would be forced to act as the food police, telling parents what they can and cannot purchase to feed their families.

If California were to consider restricting what CalFresh recipients can purchase with their benefits, the most severe consequence will be the lack of access to stores that accept EBT, as declining sales would undoubtedly force smaller and more rural stores to close. Our members already face record costs for food, and the steps to comply with such burdensome requirements

would overwhelm our razor-thin margins. Closures would not only devastate local economies but further undermine the goals of this order to improve healthy food access by exacerbating food deserts.

Our members serve at the heart of their communities and take pride as essential partners in the CalFresh program. They are committed to advancing access to healthy food in an equitable manner. Customers having a choice in what they buy is critical, and we hope you will consider allowing CalFresh recipients to keep their dignity and choice in purchasing power by not restricting eligible items by making any changes to CalFresh.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leticia Garcia', with a stylized, cursive script.

Leticia Garcia
Director, Government Relations
California Grocers Association.

Ryan Allain
Director, Government Affairs
California Retailers Association

Cc: Secretary Kim Johnson, Health & Human Services Agency
Director Jennifer Troia, Department of Social Services
The Honorable Mike McGuire, Senate President Pro Tempore
The Honorable Robert Rivas, Assembly Speaker