February 5, 2024

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Child Care Organizations and Advocates Urge State to Seek Flexibilities that will Modernize the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Improve Access to Nutritious Meals, and Create a More Sustainable Nutrition Program

Dear Governor Newsom and State Leaders,

On behalf of the CACFP Roundtable and the undersigned community-based organizations, we write to urge the State to submit, without delay, an application to the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS) to waive on-site monitoring requirements for CACFP sponsors of family child care homes and unaffiliated child care centers.

Federal child nutrition programs, including the CACFP, are required to be monitored by the state agency or their sponsor organization.¹ The on-site monitoring requirement can be particularly burdensome for sponsors of family child care homes and unaffiliated centers who work with a geographically, culturally, and linguistically diverse demographic and are required to visit their sites three times a year.

Frequently reported challenges related to the on-site monitoring requirements include: high cost of gasoline and other travel-related expenses; staff time being consumed by lengthy commutes (rural and metropolitan) and the subsequent stress on staff who manage large caseloads and competing time constraints to observe meals during specific hours; insufficient

¹Sponsors of CACFP are nonprofit community-based organizations that contract with the State to provide recruitment, oversight, distribution of federal reimbursements, technical assistance, training, and other services to child care programs. Family child care providers must work with a sponsoring agency to participate in the CACFP.
time to provide technical assistance, training, and support; and significant environmental impact due to reliance on cars rather than technology.

During the pandemic, the USDA FNS rolled out flexibilities to assist in continued operations and we learned a great deal about how to effectively modernize the CACFP. A key modernization, which increased access, broadened inclusivity, and decreased overall operating costs, was remote monitoring. Notably, remote monitoring expanded access for child care providers who are geographically hard to reach and for those who do not speak English as a primary language. CACFP Roundtable documented experiences with remote monitoring and overwhelmingly the CACFP community agrees that reasonable flexibility for remote monitoring would enhance the program and should continue to be an option for sponsors.

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My L.A. staff can be driving 4 miles an hour - takes an hour from one facility to another. Is that the best investment of her time? In-person, she’s seeing fewer meals... [virtually] she can see 2-3 dinners in one day. There is also the risk of illness and the cost of gas here in California.

-Sponsor of Family Child Care Homes with 800+ homes

The USDA FNS recognizes that waiving on-site monitoring can have positive effects on the CACFP without negatively impacting integrity, and has invited states to apply for a waiver to allow the use of remote monitoring flexibilities. Oregon is already benefiting from an approved waiver, which allows their CACFP sponsors the flexibility to utilize a hybrid of both in-person and remote monitoring.

Most California CACFP sponsors operate in the red and the majority continue to operate because they are mission driven. The loss of sponsoring organizations is significant and is creating large regions where there is NO sponsor service at all. Sponsors are the only way family child care providers can participate in this federal child nutrition entitlement program. Increasing efficiencies and decreasing costs for sponsors in California – where the cost of operating a business is particularly high – is critical. Approximately 24,000 family child care homes and nearly 100,000 children in their care are at risk of losing the financial and nutrition support of the CACFP as more organizations ponder whether they can afford to operate.

We understand that the California Department of Social Services CACFP Branch is interested in applying for the remote monitoring waiver, but the proposed application has stalled. On behalf of the children, families, child care providers, and CACFP sponsors that rely upon the program for nourishment, critical federal reimbursements, and employment, we urge the State to take swift action and apply for the waiver. Technology has outpaced regulations and the benefits of remote monitoring cannot be ignored. It is time to leverage the lessons learned from the last four years and create policies and procedures for the CACFP that are reflective of the times in which we live and the values that we espouse in California.
CACFP Roundtable and our community partners are ready to support the State in this effort and we are eager to share more information about how remote monitoring is proven to work and why it is important for the children, families, and child care providers in California.

Sincerely,

CACFP Roundtable

Cc:
Secretary Mark Ghaly, Health & Human Services Agency
Director Kim Johnson, Department of Social Services
Deputy Director Alexis Fernández Garcia, Family Engagement and Empowerment Division, Department of Social Services
Branch Chief Jessie Rosales, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Department of Social Services
First Partner, Jennifer Siebel Newsom
Senate President pro Tempore Mike McGuire
Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas
Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil, Chair Senate Committee on Human Services
Assembly Member Alex Lee, Chair Assembly Human Services Committee