



**CALIFORNIA
ASSOCIATION OF
FOOD BANKS**

1624 Franklin Street, Suite 722
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 272-4435 | cafoodbanks.org

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Dear Board Members of the CalSAWS Joint Powers Authority,

We are grateful to hear that CalSAWS intends to support the development of a public facing system that works for real people and prioritizes them in the process.

We believe that with true partnership towards our shared goals of ensuring access to services for low-income Californians, coupled with transparency and collaborative efforts, CalSAWS can be a leader in using technology to support healthy and strong communities.

Advocates fully support the development of the BenefitsCal Portal and have been working to ensure its success. We want BenefitsCal to be even better than any of the existing benefits portals we have today.

While California has seen important increases in access for consumers, we are still among the lowest in SNAP participation in the nation for those who are eligible to attain benefits. Ensuring access to online services for CalFresh applications is a vital part of making sure the CalSAWS migration will be successful for consumers. We know that if it is not successful for low-income Californians, it won't be successful for CalSAWS, counties, or anyone else.

We encourage the CalSAWS Leadership to request the CalSAWS Project Team to work collaboratively with all Stakeholders to prioritize consumer feedback in the iterative development of the BenefitsCal portal development and stabilization, including a clear plan for engagement and transparency in the decision making process.

The CalSAWS Leadership should request the CalSAWS Project Team to fully recognize and engage the pro bono support that GetCalFresh has offered to create a BenefitsCal portal that will meet the needs of Californians and be a model for the nation.

Advocates still have questions about what functionality will be made available to application assisters and consumers during the four Releases in the BenefitsCal design. Can we be provided a detailed summary of the functionality planned for each release, including indications of functionality that has been added, eliminated, or changed based on user feedback, and the functionality that is currently on the backlog list (ie, not currently planned for implementation)?

Our vision is simple: that there be a safe, secure transition that ensures equitable statewide access to CalFresh throughout the migration. We should not limit access to services in different regions, or risk instability to apply for or retain benefits, during this critical time. We request that CalSAWS leadership establish a clear goal: that BenefitsCal will meet the same level of service available statewide before other service points (such as GetCalFresh) are sunsetted.

We are grateful for the CalSAWS Board and Leadership and look forward to working together to support our shared goals of ensuring access to services for low-income consumers.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Tracy
CalSAWS Advocates Group Co-Lead
California Association of Food Banks