



How States Can Slash Hunger, Cut Poverty, Enact a Comprehensive State Food Plan, Boost Economic Opportunity, Reduce Diet-Related Diseases, and Bolster the Middle Class

By Joel Berg, CEO, Hunger Free America

Summary:

There are a significant number of common-sense, practical, and affordable ways that state governors and legislatures can slash hunger, cut poverty, enact a comprehensive food plan, boost economic opportunity, reduce diet-related diseases, and bolster the middle class. Given the likelihood that the U.S. Congress won't enact significant budgetary or legislative improvements to aid low-income Americans in 2023 and 2024, it will be particularly important for states to take such actions.

To make substantial progress on those fronts, states must do considerably more than just increasing the distribution of charitable food. Governors and legislatures should work together to enact structural, systemic changes to:

- Implement a government-wide “Assets Empowerment/Middle Class Wealth Generation Agenda” to dramatically increase economic opportunity and mobility by enabling more families to transition from *owing* non-productive debts and interest to *owning* assets such as first homes and small businesses, thereby helping struggling families to enter – and stay in – the middle class.
- Systemically increase the participation of eligible state residents in federally funded food and income-support benefits such as SNAP, WIC, child tax credits, and earned income tax credits, including by creating a digital portal to make it easier for people to simultaneously apply for multiple benefits online.
- Authorize and fund free, nutritious school lunches and breakfasts for all students, with state funds supplementing federal funds. Colorado voters just overwhelmingly approved such a program for their state, building on existing universal school meal programs in Maine and California.

- Create a “Food Jobs, Good Jobs” initiative to bolster food related business – particularly for food processing in enterprises – and use food-related businesses as a key tool of economic development.
- Combine fighting hunger with improving public health and reducing diet-related diseases by making healthier food more affordable, convenient, and physically accessible in every corner of the state, including by increasing the home and neighborhood delivery of such food. Focus on “food as medicine” and use federal Medicaid funds to simultaneously treat food and nutrition insecurity.
- Incorporate all those priorities – and many more potential executive and legislative actions – into a comprehensive state plan on economic opportunity, poverty and hunger reduction, and all aspects of food production, distribution, and sales.

Introduction

We cannot end hunger in America or any state without significantly reducing poverty, and we cannot significantly reduce poverty without first raising wages, reducing inflation, boosting economic opportunity, and bolstering the American middle class.

Similarly, we cannot ensure good nutrition for all Americans and all state residents without first ending domestic hunger.

States must enact economic and social policies to raise wages and slash poverty, make the cost of living more affordable, dramatically increase economic opportunity, and make it easier for low-income state residents to enter, and stay in, the middle class.

Hunger Free America certainly understands that most governors are very practical, and do not want to pursue unachievable, pie-in-the-sky goals. We could not agree more. Their goals should indeed be concrete, focused, and attainable.

However, as we will explain below, **ending hunger and improving nutrition by decreasing poverty and expanding upward economic mobility is a far *more* realistic strategy – from both substantive and political standpoints – than any other potential anti-hunger and nutrition improvement strategies.**

For all those reasons, the **anti-hunger plan proposed by states must center on economic and safety net improvements.** As detailed below, significantly increasing the impact of innovative grassroots partnerships and food charities would barely scratch the surface of the U.S. food insecurity crisis, which, according to the USDA Economic Research Service, affected 33.8 million Americans – including 9.3 million U.S. children – in 2021.

In theory, the nation or a state *could* end U.S. hunger simply by dramatically expanding the U.S. domestic nutrition safety net, but that is not a realistic option politically. To do so, Congress or a state might need to literally double the funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which is already set to spend about \$116 billion in federal tax funds this year.

It would need to expand eligibility for SNAP to include undocumented immigrants, as well as many families in the lower middle class, as well as provide funding to do both – *every year* – in perpetuity. That is simply politically and economically impossible.

In contrast, some of the steps needed to slash poverty (such as increasing the minimum wage in each state) not only would be free to taxpayers, but they would actually *reduce* overall federal and state spending by decreasing the number of people who need, and qualify for, safety net programs.

Economic empowerment efforts would also be far more politically popular and sustainable than dramatically increasing federal spending on redistributive safety net programs like SNAP. For example, in 2020, 61 percent of Florida voters (13 points more than voted for President Biden) voted to increase the state’s minimum wage to \$15 per hour. Low-income Americans themselves think that policies that reward work and boost upward mobility would help them the most. In a [nationwide poll conducted on behalf of Hunger Free America](#) of households earning \$40,000 or less annually, 72 to 75 percent of respondents said they would be personally aided by policies that: “increase Social Security benefits for working people”, “eliminate benefits cliffs that harm working people”, “enable consumers to better control credit ratings”, “guarantee any adult able to work a living wage job”, and “reward national service participants with mobility”.

Beyond the political and messaging reasons for needing to include economic empowerment issues in plans to fight hunger, the substantive case is a slam dunk. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the hunger reduction impact of raising wages is far greater – by a huge order of magnitude – than the impact of increasing the federal nutrition assistance safety net, which in turn is far greater – again by a huge order of magnitude – than increasing charitable food distributions.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, if the nation increased wages for the fifty million lowest-income U.S. workers by merely \$2 per hour, that would provide their households an extra \$208 billion in cash to be able to better afford nutritious food and pay for other costs of living.

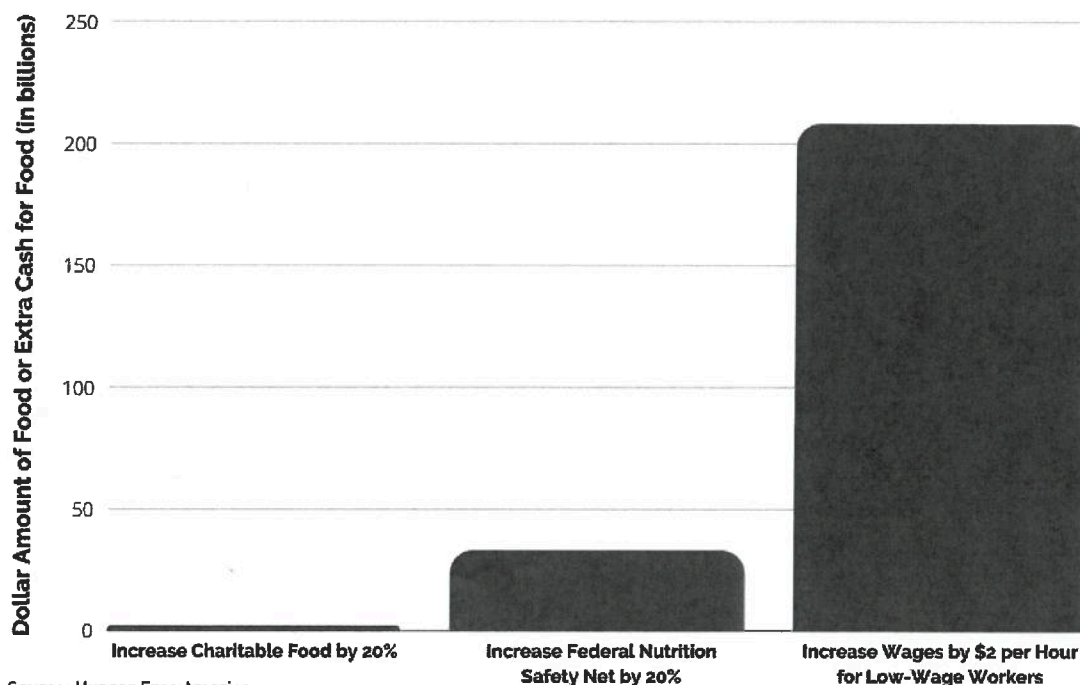
If the nation increased federal nutrition safety net funding by 20 percent, that would provide an extra \$33 billion in food for low-income Americans.

By contrast, if Feeding America (and its two hundred affiliated food banks nationwide) were to increase the food they distributed by 20 percent, that would provide an extra \$2 billion extra in food for low-income Americans.ⁱ

Figure 1

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Ways to Reduce Hunger in America



It is simply not accurate to claim that we can end hunger in the U.S. or in a state without increasing economic mobility, reducing inflation, boosting wages, and reducing poverty.

Claiming we can end hunger without reducing poverty would be like claiming we can end drought without more water.

Why a State Cannot End Hunger Just by Finding the Americans Who Are Hungry and Feeding Them

Many people assume that most low-income American families are impoverished and food insecure for long, continuous periods of time, often over multiple generations, but that is just not the case for most people who experience poverty and food insecurity in the U.S.

According to U.S. Census data, in the 48 months spanning the years 2009 through 2012, only 2.7 percent of U.S. households were below the federal poverty line for the entirety of those 48 months, but more than a third (34.5 percent) of all U.S. households experienced poverty in at least two of those months.ⁱⁱ In other words, while only one in 37 Americans lived under the

poverty line the entire four years, more than one in three Americans lived in poverty some of the time. Most families who experience poverty do so sporadically, repeatedly climbing into, and then falling out of, the middle class. Likewise, many lower middle-class Americans fall into poverty multiple times over a lifetime, often for brief stints.

U.S. food insecurity is similarly fluid, episodic, and hard to pinpoint, while impacting a huge swath of the American population over time. A study by Cornell University in 2004 found that half of all U.S. adults will receive SNAP benefits at some point in their life, yet USDA ERS reported that 45 percent of food insecure households in 2020 failed to receive help from SNAP, WIC, or school lunches in the month prior to the national food insecurity survey.

While the safety net is effective at preventing mass starvation, its current design is neither nimble nor expansive enough to meet the rapidly changing economic and personal circumstances of many struggling Americans.

A USDA ERS 2020 study on household food security found:

“Households were classified as having low or very low food security based on their experience of the conditions indicated in the survey questions at any time during the previous 12 months. The prevalence of these conditions on any given day is far below the corresponding annual prevalence. For example, the prevalence of very low food security during the 30 days before the December 2020 survey is 2.3 percent (table S-4 in Coleman-Jensen et al., 2021). Most households that reported experiencing food-insecure conditions during the previous 30 days reported experiencing the conditions in 1 to 7 days during the month.”

USDA ERS also found that in 2020, 28.6 percent of families below 185 percent of the poverty line (\$40,182 in annual income for a family of three) experienced food insecurity, while 4.9 percent of those *above* 185 percent of the poverty line did. That means very significant portions of the lowest middle class face food insecurity.

Unfortunately, most of those families above 185 percent of the poverty line earn too much to be eligible for SNAP under current law but still experience food insecurity. This also illustrates the reality that the federal poverty line is itself absurdly low.

Hunger Free America’s analysis of federal data found that from 2019-2021, 8.2 percent of employed adults in the U.S. lived in food insecure households.

Thus, if the government and/or nonprofit groups tried finding everyone in the nation or state who was food insecure or hungry *at any particular time* and providing them food at that particular time, that would be a nearly impossible task. Conversely, if you simply distributed free food through government programs and/or charities to anyone who *could become* food insecure at some point, that would be prohibitively costly and unsustainable over time. For all those reasons, it would be far easier and more cost-effective in the long run to significantly reduce economic hardship for Americans at the state living in or near poverty, thereby dramatically reducing the population of Americans who might need food assistance.

Why a State Cannot Significantly Improve Nutrition and Health Without Ending the State's Hunger and Food Insecurity

There is a boatload of data proving that the prime causes of nutrition insecurity and poor health are systemic economic and structural problems afflicting our whole society. While personal behavior certainly matters, it is not the prime cause of these problems. All the nutrition education in the world will not significantly improve nutritional intake if the food itself is too expensive, too difficult to physically access, and too time-consuming to prepare for tens of millions of low-income and working families.

As noted above, USDA found that 33.8 million Americans (including 9.3 million U.S. children) lived in food insecure homes in 2021, meaning they could not always afford enough food, or the healthy food they wanted, for themselves and their families. USDA further found that food secure households spent an average of \$11.67 per week per person more on food than did food insecure households. That means that for U.S. households of the average size of 2.5 people, over the course of 52 weeks, a food secure household will spend \$1,517 more on food than a food insecure household.

Of the 11.1 million Americans identified by USDA ERS as living in households with “very low food security” in 2021:

- 98 percent reported having worried that their food would run out before they got money to buy more.
- 97 percent reported that the food they bought just did not last, and they did not have money to get more.
- 94 percent reported that they could not afford to eat balanced meals.
- 95 percent reported that an adult had cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food; 87 percent reported that this had occurred in 3 or more months.
- 94 percent reported that they had eaten less than they felt they should because there was not enough money for food.
- 47 percent reported having lost weight because they did not have enough money for food.
- 32 percent reported that an adult did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food; 24 percent reported that this had occurred in 3 or more months.

Furthermore, data indicates a paradox of food insecure people being at higher risk for obesity, since healthier food is generally more expensive to buy, harder to physically obtain, and more time consuming to prepare than less healthy food. Nutrition insecurity is a public health issue that must be addressed in tandem with food insecurity. There is simply no way to solve nutrition insecurity without solving food insecurity.

Why Food Charities and Innovative Grassroots Anti-Hunger Projects Can Barely Dent the U.S. and State Hunger and Nutrition Insecurity Problems

Policymakers often seek “silver bullets” – miraculously successful grassroots projects that, if scaled up greatly, could solve a major social problem.

Yet the hard reality is that, when it comes to fighting domestic food insecurity and improving nutrition, there are no grassroots silver bullets.

I have been working on domestic hunger issues professionally for nearly three decades, serving for eight years in senior executive positions at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and then working for 21 years for a local and national anti-hunger nonprofit organization. I also spent years researching my first book on domestic hunger published in 2008, *All You Can Eat: How Hungry is America?*

During all that time, I traveled the nation extensively and personally visited hundreds of anti-hunger charities and grassroots anti-hunger projects (including gleaning and food rescue projects, food banks, soup kitchens, food pantries, community support agriculture projects, food policy councils, nutrition education classes, urban farms and community gardens, food-related job training programs, farmers markets, community produce canning facilities, etc.), seeking to always learn about new best practices. I have visited such projects and agencies in nearly all fifty states, and usually met with their staff, volunteers, board members, and clients/customers to observe and learn about best practices on the ground.

All those travels and site visits taught me two things: 1) the people who create and staff these agencies and projects are among the finest human beings in the nation, pouring their sweat and blood into trying to feed their neighbors, usually for low salaries or no salaries at all; and 2) no matter how heroic their efforts, none of their projects can do more than slightly dent the hunger and nutrition insecurity problem in their community, even if their operations significantly ramped up.

It is important to note that some of these projects are only successful *because* of their small size. For example, food rescue and gleaning organizations only have a finite amount of edible, safe excess food they can recover and distribute, and many such organizations would significantly decrease their cost-effectiveness if they built larger sorting facilities, purchased bigger truck fleets, and/or hired more staff, because the volume of food they distributed could not grow in proportion to their costs. Usable land for urban farming and gardening land is also finite, and rooftop and/or indoor agriculture is generally very expensive. Many other projects that are mostly based outdoors and/or are dependent on seasonal harvests (such as farm gleaning projects, local food processing, urban agriculture and community gardens, farmers markets, community supported agriculture projects, outdoor green/produce carts, etc.) are usually only in full operation a few months out of the year (with some exceptions in some locations in Florida, Texas, or California). Even after accounting for certain crops (like apples and some root

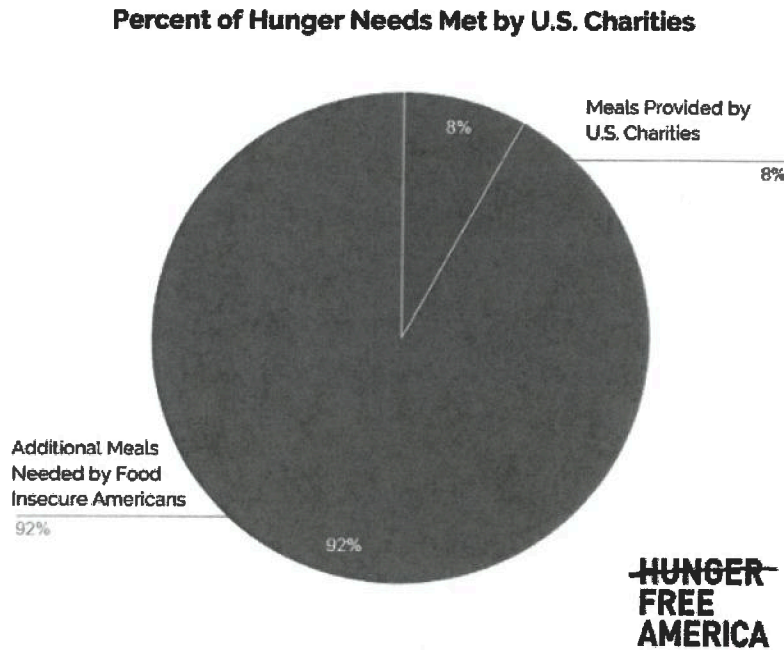
vegetables) that can be stored year long, such seasonal efforts are hardly a serious response to the year-round, nationwide, food and nutrition insecurity suffered by tens of millions of Americans.

What about the nation's slightly more than two hundred food banks, and the tens of thousands of community-based food pantries and soup kitchens that they supply with food? They absolutely play a vital role in filling in gaps in the safety net, and they need and deserve more resources; however, there are numerous reasons why relying on food banks and other food charities to play a lead role in fighting hunger and reducing nutrition insecurity is insufficient and limited.

In her seminal 1999 book about the U.S. charitable food system, *Sweet Charity, Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, sociologist Janet Poppendieck lists what she calls the “Seven Deadly ‘Ins’” of the network: insufficiency (not enough food); inappropriateness (people do not get to choose what is best for their families); nutritional inadequacy (too much processed, high-sugar, high-sodium, high-fat junk food); instability (feeding agencies cannot always predict when they will be open and when they will run out of food); inaccessibility (they are particularly difficult to get to in rural areas or for seniors, people with disabilities, and people without cars; most are closed on nights and weekends when working people most need them); inefficiency (the agencies require a massive, three-tier system just to give out free food); and indignity (at even the best-run agencies, it is usually degrading to obtain emergency food).

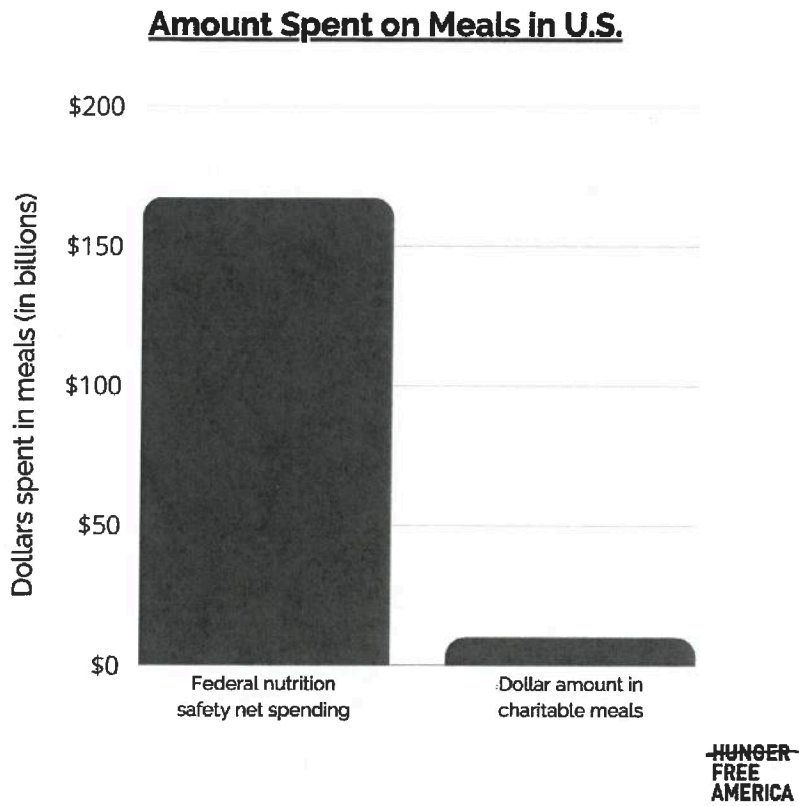
Of all those problems, the insufficiency in the dollar amount of charitable food is the most significant. In 2020, 38.3 million Americans lived in food insecure homes; if they were to eat three meals per day for 365 days, it would require 41.9 billion meals. In contrast, as explained in endnote ii and as **Figure 2** demonstrates, Feeding America reported that its network of two hundred regional food banks distributed 3.4 billion charitable meals, equaling just about eight percent of the meals that would be consumed by food insecure U.S. families if they ate three meals per day every day. ⁱⁱⁱ

Figure 2



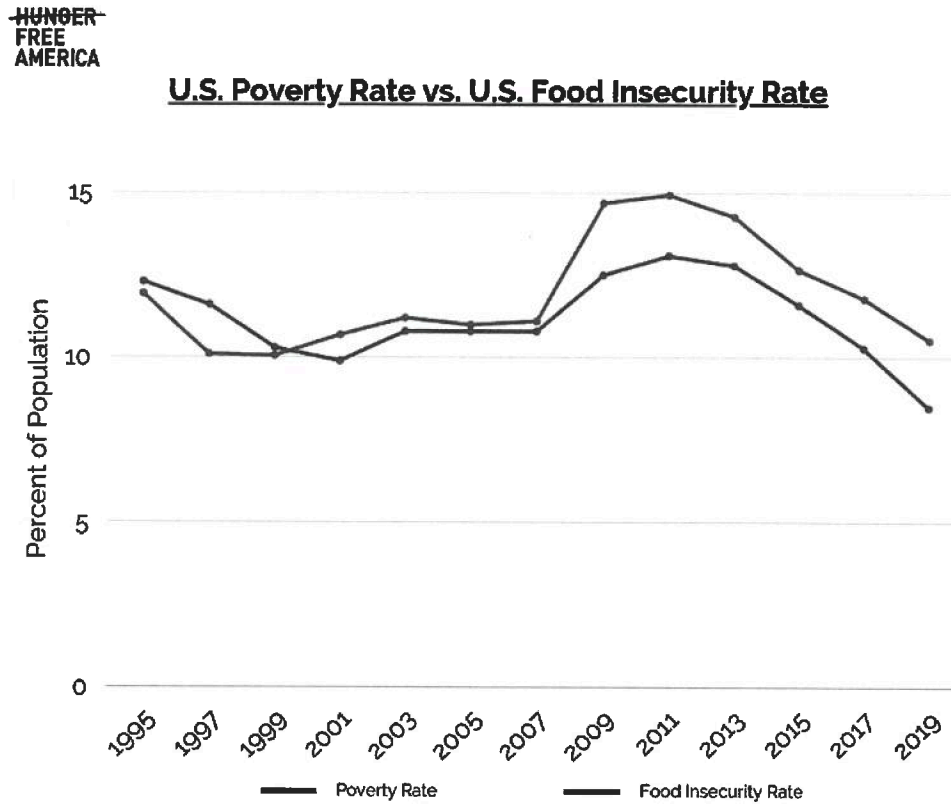
As **Figure 3** demonstrates, while food charities distributed an impressive \$10 billion worth of meals in 2020, the federal government spent \$167 billion on nutrition assistance programs in FY22, seventeen times the dollar value of food distributed by the charities. The most iconic hunger-related image of the COVID-19 pandemic was that of thousands of cars lined up at a San Antonio, Texas food bank. But that overshadowed the reality that, in that same month in that same county, 294,512 local residents received \$33.6 million in SNAP benefits. If, let's say, that line of cars ultimately obtained food for 5,000 people, each person received \$25 worth of food, then that line provided food to only 1/59th of the number of the people in that county who received SNAP, and only 1/269th of the dollar amount of food provided by SNAP.

Figure 3



While the size of, and funding for, federal nutrition assistance programs is a significant variable in how much hunger and food insecurity there is in the U.S., the national poverty rate is, by far, the more important variable, as **Figure 4** demonstrates. It is obvious that food insecurity rates track almost exactly with poverty rates.

Figure 4



Hunger and food insecurity in the U.S. are *not* primarily food distribution problems — they are mostly affordability problems. The federal minimum wage – stuck at \$7.25 per hour for the last 13 years – equals only \$13,195 for full time work, leaving that worker significantly below the federal poverty threshold of \$23,030 for a family of three. Yet the average U.S. rent in April 2022 was \$1,827 per month (16.7 percent higher than the previous year), equaling \$21,924 for a year, far more than a minimum wage salary. Even if we were remarkably successful in increasing the amount of government-funded and charitable food by, let’s say, 10 percent, if housing prices for low-income Americans increased by 16 percent, then food insecurity would likely be higher. That analysis does not even factor in soaring costs for childcare, health care, transportation, clothing, utilities, prescription drugs, phone and internet costs, and, yes, food. People then cut spending for the only flexible budget item they can — food — by buying less or less healthy but cheaper options, in order to save money to pay for other costs of living, which are fixed costs.

Considering food access and affordability in a vacuum – detached from the broader economics of wages and prices – is a futile exercise.

Concrete Actions State Governments

To slash hunger and boost nutrition security within their borders, states need to make healthier food more affordable. We also need to make it more physically accessible in every neighborhood across the country and make it more convenient to prepare and consume.

Broadly speaking, in terms of making it easier for state residents to afford food, states need to enable struggling residents to 1) increase their wages; 2) decrease their other costs of living; 3) decrease food prices through both market forces and more aggressive government crackdowns on illegal price gouging, monopolies, and price fixing; and 4) increase the government nutrition assistance safety net.

Here are more specific action steps:

Overall Food Policy - Leadership and Governance

- As previously proposed by Hunger Free America CEO Joel Berg, in a paper for the Center for American Progress, states should develop comprehensive “Food Action Plans” to detail and implement comprehensive policies on food, hunger, poverty reduction, economic opportunity, food insecurity, nutrition insecurity, and food systems – from “farm to fork” – with a special emphasis on increasing participation among eligible state residents in federal nutrition assistance programs. The plans should incorporate all or many of the action steps below – and many more potential executive and legislative actions.
- State governments should host their own local conferences on food, nutrition, hunger, and health as a follow-up to the White House conference. They can use their conferences to create and/or release to their public their own state food action plan.
- State governments that don’t already have their own Offices of Food & Hunger Policy and Directors of Food & Hunger policy should create them.
- State governments that don’t already have their own Food & Hunger Councils should create them. Such Councils in many places have already been proven to be effective tools to bring together diverse stakeholders, but all must ensure they include focuses on fighting hunger and poverty, and making healthy food affordable to everyone - not just on boosting sustainable agriculture.

Poverty Reduction and Economic Opportunity Expansion

- States should raise their minimum wages, index future increases to inflation, and fully cover tipped workers and agricultural workers. Hunger Free America’s groundbreaking analysis of federal data found that, in 2019-2021, 8.2% of employed adults – 12.7 million working adults -- in the U.S. lived in food insecure households. The states with the highest rates of food insecurity among employed adults were Arkansas (11.9%), Delaware (11.4%), Oklahoma (11.2%), Mississippi (11.0%), Louisiana (11.2%), Texas

11.3% and Utah (10.5%). There was a strong correlation between state minimum wage rates and state rates of food insecurity.

- Authorize, fund, and implement a government-wide “Assets Empowerment/Middle Class Wealth Generation Agenda” to dramatically increase economic opportunity and mobility by enabling more families to transition from owing non-productive debts interest to owning assets such as first homes, small businesses and/or retirement accounts. This would be a concrete, focused, funded policy agenda, starting with pilot projects to test varied program strategies to enable low-income people and families to get ahead. This work should be combined with initiatives to eliminate, or at least reduce “benefits cliffs”, in which workers who get raises or work more hours lose benefits. Sometimes the value of lost benefits actually exceeds the increase in wages. Even if federal policies related to benefits cliffs don’t change any time soon, states can still use state funds to erase, or at least limit them, by providing extra state payments to make up for losses in federal benefits. Over time, these efforts would save states money by enabling families to move towards economic advancement and thus eventually need less in benefits and pay more in taxes.
- Enact and fund state-level legislation – modeled on the federal H.O.P.E. Act – to create pilot projects at the county and city level to enable low-income residents of the pilot area(s) to: 1) apply for multiple food and anti-poverty benefits online simultaneously and combine that with banking services; and 2) voluntarily work in partnership with a government agencies and nonprofit groups to develop and implement a long-term action plan to advance economy self-sufficiency such as saving for a down payment on a first home, starting a small business, and/or saving for retirement.
- Work with the federal government to ensure free health care and prescription drugs for all; make quality housing, childcare, utilities, broadband access, and public transportation affordable for all.
- Launch a State “Good Jobs, Food Jobs” initiative by working together to provide more technical assistance and seed money to more food-related start-up companies (especially those focused on food processing), and particularly those owned by women and people of color; ensure that food-related enterprises are a principal component of every economic development and business expansion plan in the state; target more job training funds to food-related and social service professions.
- Offices/departments for the aging should develop and implement a comprehensive plan to help more older Americans access SNAP, senior center meals, and home delivered meals.
- Create a State Guaranteed Winner Lottery. State-run lotteries tend to prey-on low-income people, increase inequality of wealth, and make it even less likely that people in poverty can save the funds necessary to enter – and stay in – the middle class. Yet I believe banning such government lotteries wouldn’t end these problems, because gambling is a basic human impulse. If we eliminated legal lotteries, organized crime would surely step

up to run additional illegal – even more exploitive – ones. The better alternative is for the State to authorize what I call “Guaranteed Winner Lotteries,” which would allocate their largest pay-outs for participants who set aside a minimal amount of funds when they buy lottery tickets, to be placed in special, tax-free, savings accounts that could only be used to start a small business, put a down payment on a home, pay for college education or job training, or accumulate funds for retirement – thereby boosting their long-term economic security. Lottery-promoted savings programs have precedents in “Lottery Bonds” sponsored by some foreign governments and “Prize Linked-Savings Accounts” privately run by some U.S. companies.

Federally Funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamps Program

- Make it a top priority to enroll more eligible state residents in SNAP, but particularly those in underserved populations: older Americans, low-income working people, documented immigrants and mixed immigration status households, and college students. Fully 18 percent of all people eligible – and a whopping 26 percent of eligible working people and a stunning 58 percent of eligible people 60 years and older fail to receive SNAP, losing out on billions of dollars of nutrition assistance for their households and local food businesses. This under-participation can deprive state residents of billions of dollars’ worth of groceries, which would also benefit the state’s economy.
- Launch a statewide, multi-agency communications and outreach effort to enroll more eligible U.S. residents in federally funded nutrition assistance programs, including SNAP, WIC, P-EBT, school breakfast and lunch, and summer meals. This could also be combined with vaccine outreach, childcare assistance, and/or rental assistance outreach.
- If your state has not already done so, use categorical eligibility provisions to eliminate the SNAP assets test (which, when in place, limits the ability of people to save their way out of poverty) and raising SNAP eligibility from 130% to 185% of the poverty line (thereby reducing penalties on people who work).
- Provide a dedicated funding stream for government agencies and nonprofit groups to conduct outreach for SNAP, WIC, summer meals, and other food programs. The SNAP portion of such outreach dollars can be matched 100 percent by the federal government.
- Enable more states and counties to not only apply for and implement, but also communicate fully to the public, their adoption of The Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP), to make it easier for older Americans to access SNAP. They should also communicate clearly as to which older applicants (such as those with high medical expenses) should still use longer applications to obtain higher benefit amounts. Offices/departments for the aging should better advertise SNAP; most promote senior center meals and meals-on-wheels but ignore SNAP.
- Better integrate SNAP enrollment with enrollment in federally funded Social Security Insurance (SSI) and Disability Insurance (DI) enrollment. Federal SNAP law has a

requirement that the Social Security Administration (SSA) take SNAP applications from SSI applicants/participants as well as DI applicants/participants. USDA FNS reimburses the Social Security Administration for this work. This hasn't been a particularly robust entry point for the past few decades, but USDA and SSA are hoping to make it better; therefore, increased interest from other levels of local government in their regional SSA operations asking about this, and higher expectations for service and best practices that require funding, will help energize this shared national office effort.

- More aggressively use state SNAP outreach dollars (including private foundation dollars on SNAP outreach) – all of which are matched one-to-one by USDA FNS out of entitlement federal funds – to conduct SNAP outreach in partnership with nonprofit organizations. Doing so is a “win-win” – maximizing both federal outreach dollars and federal benefits dollars.
- Provide funding and/or technical assistance to pilot neighborhood/community SNAP and WIC delivery hubs to reduce shipping costs for food.
- Enact and fund a SNAP-like program, to be funded by the State, to give extra grocery funds to immigrants and working poor US residents who are ineligible for federal SNAP benefits. California recently started such a program.
- Apply for the USDA SNAP Restaurant Meals program, then work with nonprofit groups to conduct outreach to residents who are homeless, have disabilities, and are elderly to help enroll them in SNAP and use their benefits, if they choose to do so, at participating restaurants. Work with restaurants and food ordering companies to enable such food to be delivered to homes and shelters.
- Better fight college student hunger by promoting college student SNAP enrollment, in close collaboration with state universities and community colleges.
- Work with USDA to enable SNAP recipients to digitally redeem their SNAP benefits (through a system like Apple Wallet or Google Pay) instead of using EBT cards, which have more stigma, are more susceptible to theft and skimming, and are often lost in the mail.
- Provide more technical assistance and equipment to farmers markets and individual farmers to help them accept SNAP and WIC online.
- When people apply for unemployment compensation, inform them how they may be eligible for SNAP and WIC.

Federally Funded WIC Benefits for Pregnant, Postpartum and Breastfeeding People and Children Under Five

- Boost participation of pregnant women and children under five in WIC. According to USDA FNS, in the average month of 2018, WIC served an estimated 56.9 percent of

those eligible for WIC, a decrease from the revised estimate for 2016 (58.9 percent). This is particularly problematic given that WIC is available to many immigrant households who are ineligible for SNAP, as well as to lower middle-class households who may earn slightly too much money to be eligible for SNAP.

- Better utilize SNAP and Medicaid as passports to WIC enrollment without separate applications to WIC. Enrollment in those two programs prequalifies households for WIC. The federal government is now pushing such cross enrollments, but here again, state and local governments can help drive better service by requesting cross enrollment rates. The standard for cross enrollment from SNAP to school meals is 95%. If it drops below 90%, USDA FNS requires a corrective action plan from the state. Also, states and local government should make it easier for people to apply for SNAP and WIC in the same application.
- Work administratively with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to extend the pandemic flexibilities that enabled more WIC enrollment activities and program activities to be carried out remotely instead of in-person at WIC clinics. Provide State technical assistance, funding, and policy support to WIC clinics to enable them to serve more families remotely by video and/or phone, instead of requiring them to come to WIC clinics in-person to receive service.
- Work with state departments of education and school districts to promote WIC to public school parents.
- Work with the federal government on a comprehensive outreach and communications plan aimed at helping immigrants understand the revised “public charge” regulations, to help more immigrants understand that obtaining WIC, SNAP, housing aid, and government health insurance will not negatively impact their immigration status.
- Work administratively with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to accelerate its planned efforts to help online only retailers; farmers markets and farm stands; and small grocery stores, bodegas, and corner stores to accept both SNAP and WIC online. Many retailers still find the current USDA system to apply to do so overly lengthy, costly, and nontransparent about the steps they need to get approved. Work administratively with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to Work administratively with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to combine systems for SNAP and WIC online ordering. The current two-track system is overly burdensome for both program recipients and retailers.

Schools Meals and Other Child Nutrition Programs

- Authorize and fund free, nutritious school lunches and breakfasts for all students, with state funds supplementing federal funds. Colorado voters just overwhelmingly approved such a program for their state, building on existing universal school meal programs in Maine and California.

- Increase participation statewide in federally funded school breakfast programs by mandating -- and providing - technical assistance and limited funding to support implementation of a policy mandating that breakfast be served in first period classrooms. This would also help fight the pandemic by increasing the social distancing of students by preventing them from needing to congregate in cafeterias for breakfast.
- Provide more technical assistance to increase the participation of children in – and include more nonprofit groups to participate in the provision of— federally funded summer meals. Enable more nonprofit soup kitchens to participate in this program.
- Provide more technical assistance to school districts, counties, cities, towns, villages, tribal governments and nonprofit groups to increase participation of children in federally funded after-school supper and after-school snack programs.
- Mandate that schools serve breakfasts and lunches at hours when children would normally eat breakfast and lunch.

Nutrition, Health, and Community Food Systems

- Do more to promote gleaning on farms and food donations by farmers by providing farmers with more information (including details of legal liability protections) and technical assistance, and by using state volunteerism commissions to recruit volunteers for gleaning activities.
- Provide more technical assistance and funding to CSAs and discount produce box programs in low-income communities/neighborhoods.
- Buy food from local farmers for distribution through schools, food banks, prisons, government hospitals, food pantries, and soup kitchens. Such food should be grown in a way that is environmentally sustainable and provides the farm workers living wages and safe working conditions.
- Develop a “food access index” - at the urban neighborhood level (perhaps by community board district or ward) and the suburban or rural community level - that incorporates both food prices and physical availability of food.
- Provide increased technical assistance and seed money for urban and suburban farms and gardens.
- Create a nutrition education smart phone app tied to market UPC codes for individual products.
- Include healthy food as an eligible expense in Medicaid waivers. California and a number of other states are already doing so in some form.
- Help more schools, hospitals, and prisons purchase their food from local farmers and food processors.

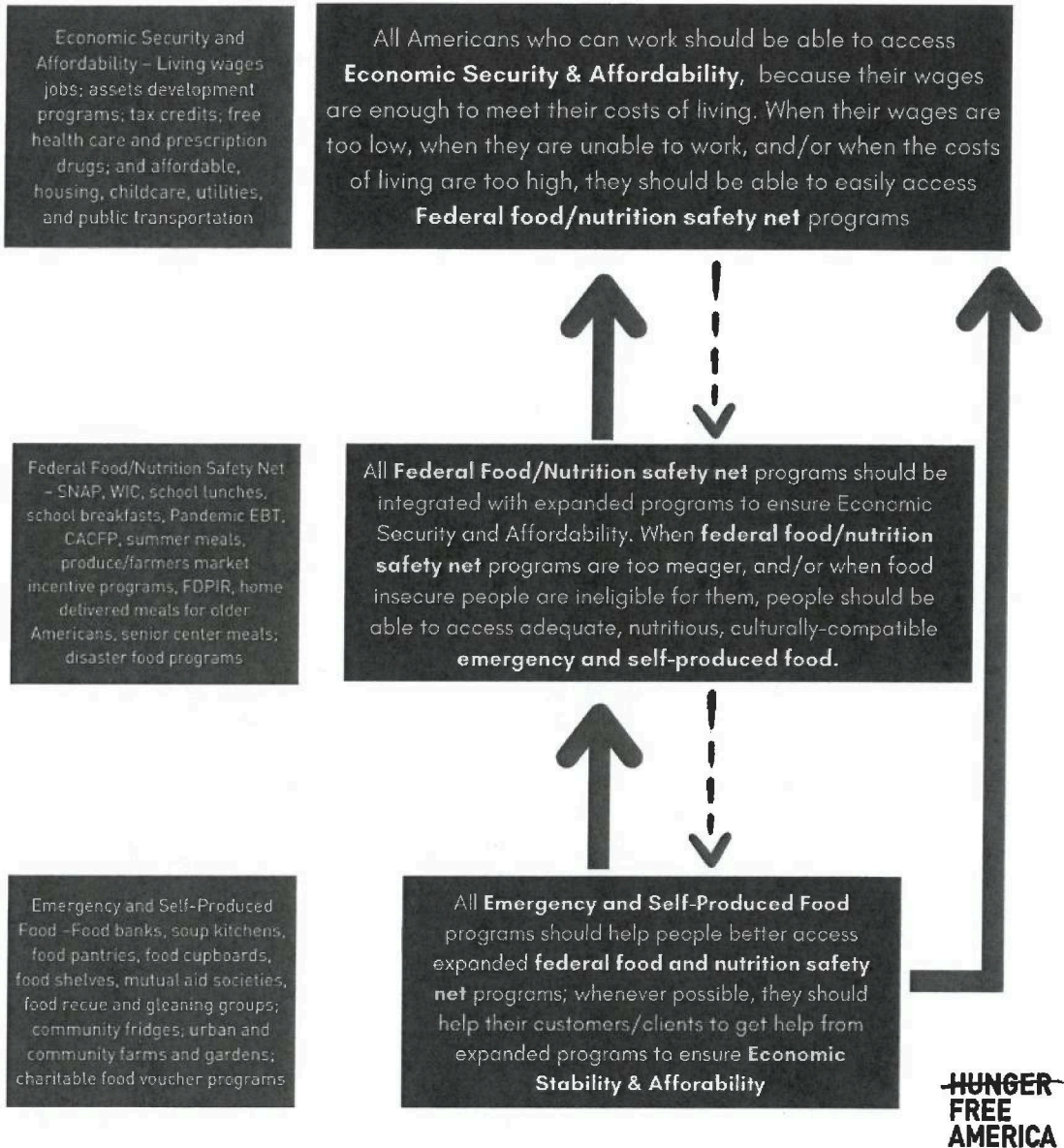
- Improve – and make more culturally sensitive – nutrition education curriculum used by schools statewide.
- Better harness citizen service and volunteerism to fight hunger. Direct more federal AmeriCorps national service funds under the State’s control (through the state National and Community Service commission) to programs fighting hunger and improving nutrition, including projects that deliver food from farmers markets and nonprofit food co-ops to SNAP and WIC recipients. Promote the use of more skills-based, professional volunteers to aid hunger organizations. Develop a state anti-hunger service/volunteerism handbook.
- Ensure that all nutrition education activities provided are culturally sensitive, hands on (using actually available, affordable foods), delivered by diverse staff and/or volunteers, and are practical, based on monetary and time constraints of clients.

A Continuum of Action

States should also ensure that all their government programs and charitable aid mutually reinforce each other through the “Continuum of Action” detailed below.

The good news is that *we can end U.S. hunger and ensure good nutrition for all Americans.* We just need to be candid with the American people, and ourselves, about what it will take to accomplish those vitals goals.

A Dynamic Continuum of Action



NOTES

ⁱ If \$50 million low-income workers earned two dollars more per hour and were paid for 40 hours of work per week for 52 weeks in a year, that would equal \$208 billion. In FY 2022, combining the USDA FNS programs and the HHS older Americans nutrition assistance programs, along with the minimal funding for FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program, the federal government spent about \$167 billion on domestic nutrition assistance. I note that this is likely a significant under-estimate, since it does not include most of the money that FEMA gave states and localities for disaster relief in Fiscal Year 2022; many states and localities used significant amounts of those payments for food purchases and distribution. Feeding America reported that in 2021 their food bank network distributed food that equaled 4.18 billion meals, not including meals funded by the federal government through commodities or SNAP. USDA ERS found that in 2020 food insecure households overall spent \$50 per person on food per week, which equaled \$2.38 per person per meal. Thus, if the 4.18 billion meals distributed by Feeding America were worth an average of \$2.38 per meal, that would mean that Feeding America and its network distributed \$9.9 billion worth of charitable food in 2021. Those figures include food that Feeding America and its food banks distributed directly to the public and indirectly to the public through neighborhood soup kitchens, food pantries, food cupboards, and food shelves affiliated with food banks, but do *not* include extra food that those soup kitchens, food pantries, food cupboards, food shelves provided to the public *in addition to* the food provided to them by food banks. Neither do these numbers include food distributed directly to the public by mostly small soup kitchens, food pantries, food cupboards that are not affiliated with Feeding America food banks. Nor do these numbers include food distributed to the public by charitable mutual aid societies, food rescue and gleaning groups, community fridges, urban and community farms and gardens, and charitable food voucher programs that are not affiliated with feeding America. In all, such extra charitable food provided in addition to food bank food likely equals tens of millions worth of additional food, but not enough to significantly reduce U.S. hunger. Thus, my undercount in federal spending is likely more significant than my undercount in charitable food distribution. Perhaps the White House could ask the USDA Economic Research Service, the Census Bureau, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics to work together to provide more exact estimates for the relative value of raising wages, versus expanding the safety net, versus increasing charitable food.

ⁱⁱ Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 2009–2011,” U.S. Census Bureau, Tables 3 and 4 https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/publications/dynamics09_12/index.html (accessed June 21, 2016).

ⁱⁱⁱ It is important to note, that because of the imprecision in targeting noted in this report, not all people who receive emergency food are technically food insecure and many food insecure Americans receive no food from charities.



Contra
Costa
County

To: Board of Supervisors
From: Mary Ann Mason, County Counsel
Date: December 13, 2022

Subject: Continuing Teleconference Meetings (AB 361, Government Code § 54953(e))

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. FIND that the Board of Supervisors has reconsidered the circumstances of the Statewide state of emergency proclaimed by the Governor on March 4, 2020, and the Countywide local emergency proclaimed by the Board of Supervisors on March 10, 2020.
2. FIND that the following circumstances exist: (a) the Statewide state of emergency and the Countywide local emergency continue to directly impact the ability of the Board of Supervisors in all its capacities, its committees, and its advisory bodies to meet safely in person because the highly transmissible Omicron variant of COVID-19 and its subvariants are present in the County; and (b) the County Health Officer's recommendations for safely holding public meetings, which recommend virtual meetings and other measures to promote social distancing, are still in effect.
3. AUTHORIZE the Board of Supervisors, in its capacity as the governing board of the County, the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, the Housing Authority of the County of Contra Costa, the Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, and the Contra Costa County In-Home Supportive Services Public Authority, and its subcommittees, to continue teleconference meetings under Government Code section 54953(e) for the next 30 days.
4. AUTHORIZE all advisory bodies, committees, and commissions established by the Board in all its capacities, including but not limited to municipal advisory councils and the Measure X Community Advisory Body, to continue teleconference meetings under Government Code section 54953(e) for the next 30 days.
5. REQUIRE advisory bodies, commissions, and committees whose jurisdiction extends into all Supervisorial

APPROVE OTHER
 RECOMMENDATION OF CNTY ADMINISTRATOR RECOMMENDATION OF BOARD COMMITTEE

Action of Board On: 12/13/2022 APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED OTHER

Clerks Notes:

VOTE OF SUPERVISORS

AYE: Candace Andersen, District II Supervisor
Diane Burgis, District III Supervisor
Karen Mitchoff, District IV Supervisor
Federal D. Glover, District V Supervisor

ABSENT: John Gioia, District I
Supervisor

Contact: Cynthia A. Schwerin, Assistant
County Counsel, (925) 655-2200

I hereby certify that this is a true and correct copy of an action taken and entered on the minutes of the Board of Supervisors on the date shown.

ATTESTED: December 13, 2022

Monica Nino, County Administrator and Clerk of the Board of
Supervisors

By: June McHuen, Deputy

districts ("Countywide bodies") that hold in-person meetings to conduct these meetings in a "hybrid" format that permits members of the Countywide body, staff, and members of the public to access the meetings both remotely and in person.

6. ENCOURAGE advisory bodies whose jurisdiction does not extend into all Supervisorial districts ("limited jurisdiction bodies") to conduct any live meetings in a "hybrid" format that permits members of the limited jurisdiction body, staff, and members of the public to access the meetings both remotely and in person.

RECOMMENDATION(S): (CONTD)

7. REQUEST that the Planning Commission, Merit Board, and Assessment Appeals Board consider holding teleconference meetings under Government Code section 54953(e) for the next 30 days or holding meetings in a "hybrid" format that permits members of the body, staff, and members of the public to access the meetings both remotely and in person.

8. DIRECT the County Administrator/Clerk of the Board and staff to the various Board advisory bodies to take all actions necessary to implement the intent and purpose of this Board order, including conducting open and public meetings in accordance with Government Code section 54953(e) and all other applicable provisions of the Brown Act.

9. DIRECT the County Administrator/Clerk of the Board to return to the Board acting in all its capacities, no later than 30 days after this Board order is adopted, with an item to reconsider the state of emergency and whether to continue authorizing virtual meetings under the provisions of Government Code section 54953(e) and to make required findings as to all bodies covered by this Board order.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This is an administrative action with no direct fiscal impact.

BACKGROUND:

On October 5, 2021, the Board adopted Resolution No. 2021/327, which authorized the Board, in all its capacities, and certain subcommittees and advisory bodies, to conduct teleconferencing meetings under Government Code section 54953(e). This section of the Brown Act, which was added by Assembly Bill 361, allows a local agency to use special teleconferencing rules during a State declared state of emergency. When a legislative body uses the emergency teleconferencing provisions under Government code section 54953(e), the following rules apply:

- The agency must provide notice of the meeting and post an agenda as required by the Brown Act and Better Government Ordinance, but the agenda does not need to list each teleconference location or be physically posted at each teleconference location.
- The agenda must state how members of the public can access the meeting and provide public comment.
- The agenda must include an option for all persons to attend via a call-in or internet-based service option.
- The body must conduct the meeting in a manner that protects the constitutional and statutory rights of the public.
- If there is a disruption in the public broadcast of the meeting, or of the public's ability to comment virtually for reasons within the body's control, the legislative body must stop the meeting and take no further action on agenda items until public access and/or ability to comment is restored.
- Local agencies may not require public comments to be submitted in advance of the meeting and must allow virtual comments to be submitted in real time.
- The body must allow a reasonable amount of time per agenda item to permit members of the public to comment, including time to register or otherwise be recognized for the purposes of comment.
- If the body provides a timed period for all public comment on an item, it may not close that period before the time has elapsed.
- AB 361 sunsets on January 1, 2024.

Under Government Code section 54953(e), if the local agency wishes to continue using these special teleconferencing rules after adopting an initial resolution, the legislative body must reconsider the circumstances of the state of emergency every 30 days and make certain findings. The agency must find that the state declared emergency continues to exist and either that it continues to directly impact the ability of officials and members of the public to meet safely in person, or that state or local officials continue to impose or recommend measures to promote social distancing.

The Board last considered these matters on November 29, 2022, made the required findings and authorized continued use of special teleconferencing rules. The Board can again find that the Statewide state of emergency continues to exist, that the state and Countywide local emergencies continue to directly impact the ability of the

Board of Supervisors in all its capacities, and its subcommittees, and advisory bodies to meet safely in person, and that state or local officials continue to impose or recommend measures to promote social distancing.

The Public Health Officer has advised that the highly transmissible Omicron variant of COVID-19 and its subvariants are present in the County. In addition, on December 7, 2022, the County Health Officer again issued recommendations for safely holding public meetings that included recommended measures to promote social distancing as the current trends, as of December 7, 2022, of COVID-19 case rates, test positivity, hospitalizations, and wastewater surveillance are increasing (See Attachment A, Health Officer's Recommendations). Among the Health Officer's recommendations: (1) on-line meetings (teleconferencing meetings) are encouraged as those meetings present the lowest risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19; (2) if a local agency determines to hold in-person meetings, offering the public the opportunity to attend via a call-in option or an internet-based service option is recommended when possible to give those at higher risk of and/or higher concern about COVID-19 an alternative to participating in person; (3) a written safety protocol should be developed and followed, and it is recommended that the protocol require social distancing - i.e., six feet of separation between attendees; (4) seating arrangements should allow for staff and members of the public to easily maintain at least six-foot distance from one another at all practicable times; and (5) all meeting attendees should be strongly encouraged to wear masks and to be up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine.

CONSEQUENCE OF NEGATIVE ACTION:

The Board, in all its capacities, and its subcommittees and advisory bodies, would no longer conduct teleconferencing meetings under Government Code section 54953(e).

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A, Health Officer's Recommendations