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April 20, 2021

Honorable Lisa Calderon  
Chair, Human Services Committee  
California State Assembly  
Capitol Building, Room 2137  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 396 (GABRIEL) as amended March 29, 2021 – SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Gabriel:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports AB 396**. This bill is scheduled for hearing before Assembly Human Services committee on April 21, 2021.

Assembly Bill 396 (Gabriel) to greatly expand the number of students receiving CalFresh benefits by requiring higher education programs that qualify under the Employment and Training (E&T) Services Program CalFresh student exemption to be certified by CDSS by June of 2022.

Food insecurity and hunger is a rampant issue on California's college campuses. Nearly one in three California college students faces food and housing insecurity, according to a [survey](#) by the California Student Aid Commission. Students of color are more likely than others to report needs in both areas. According to California State University (CSU), [one in five CSU students experience hunger](#). In a [survey](#) recently conducted by the University of California Regents, it was found that one in five University of California (UC) students do not have access to adequate food or nutrition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these economic and basic needs issues for students. A [report](#) found that almost 3 out of every 5 students said they were experiencing basic needs insecurity during the pandemic. The report also highlights the heightened basic needs insecurity threatening retention for students of color. 74% of Indigenous and 71% of Black students responding to the survey reported facing basic needs insecurity, illustrating how the pandemic has magnified pervasive racial disparities.

California's institutions of higher education have numerous programs that qualify under a CalFresh student exemption known as the local programs that increase employability standard that would, upon program approval, grant CalFresh benefits to students in need. Unfortunately, most of these programs have not applied to qualify under this standard, leaving many students in want of well-deserved CalFresh benefits.

By requiring these programs to apply, this measure will ensure that thousands of students will be newly eligible for CalFresh and that California takes full advantage of federal funding to support students in need at no additional cost to the state.

For these reasons, DRC supports this bill. Please contact me if you have any questions about our position or if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sawait Seyoum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sawait Seyoum  
Senior Legislative Advocate  
Disability Rights California

cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Human Services Committee  
Honorable Jesse Gabriel, California State Assembly  
Dana Alpert, Legislative and Communications Assistant, Office of  
Assemblymember Gabriel