

Federal Policy Priorities 2022

February 2022

Federal funds provide 38 percent of all revenues to SSA for the many services, programs, and benefits the agency offers. Federal resources have a significant history in providing support for low-income and vulnerable communities throughout Alameda County, with some programs dating back more than five decades. With the presidential administration, there are opportunities to expand federally-funded anti-poverty programs, which were previously at risk. Some policy proposals from the previous administration that limited programs and threatened communities have been enacted, while others are still pending in process. Advocacy to rescind harmful reductions in rights and services is critical, as well as freezing and reversing policies that were pending. Highlighted policies for the upcoming year include:

- **Medicaid / Health Care Access:** The need for affordable health care is particularly salient during a public health emergency. The American Rescue Plan continued the increased the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) of 6.2 percentage points, providing states additional funding for Child Welfare, Medicaid, CHIP and WIC. The FMAP enhancement should be extended to assist with growing healthcare expenditures by states, and continued through the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Additionally, Medicaid eligibility redeterminations and renewals, which were eased during the pandemic, should be phased in for a period of time after the pandemic ends. Policies that provide enhanced subsidies for households purchasing health insurance through the exchanges – many of which are just above the income threshold for Medicaid – should be considered, so that low and moderate income households do not face “benefit cliffs” for healthcare access.
- **Child Welfare:** The California Well-Being Project (Title IV-E Waiver) was a federal program that offered flexibility in child welfare services funding. This allowed Alameda County to invest resources more effectively in proven and innovative approaches that better ensure the safety of children and the success of families. Implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) and the Stronger Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (“Stronger CAPTA”) should provide flexibilities for states, so the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) in California can align with new requirements and continue to make gains in improving the lives of children and families.
- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA):** WIOA is a federal law passed in 2014, which reauthorized the nation’s employment and training programs related to adult, dislocated workers and youth, as well as adult education and vocational rehabilitation programs. With recent deep budget cuts, some of the legislation’s goals are unlikely to be met and resources to help people with employment barriers are at serious risk. Funding is needed for enhanced supportive services for job seekers, stipends for youth participants in work-based learning programs, and for the coordination and alignment of Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs), California Community College Districts, Adult Schools/Adult Consortium, K-12 education, and Economic Development agencies.

Preserve & Enhance Access to Supportive Services

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** The 2018 Farm Bill largely retained many of SNAP’s operating provisions, and the updated Thrifty Food Plan assists families with increasing food prices.
 - The Family First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) provided emergency allotments for SNAP recipients up to the maximum benefit available for their household size, and the Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA) provided a 15 percent increase in SNAP benefits for all households. Both were extended through the American Rescue Plan. Both policies should be extended through the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Additionally, the lifetime ban on SNAP assistance for ex-felons who have served their prison sentence should be eliminated.

Federal Policy Priorities 2022

February 2022

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):** While flexibilities have been provided to the administration of TANF so that application and recertification processes are eased for state and county agencies and participating families, there is a need for increased funding for the program. The program should further be protected against proposals for elimination in favor of direct cash assistance to families with children, such as Guaranteed Income pilots and the expanded Child Tax Credit. Additionally, there should be more flexible work participation requirements to give credit for client engagement and work activities not meeting the current thresholds.
- **Early Care and Education (ECE):** The need for affordable, accessible quality child care has been highlighted through the closure of many facilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while essential workers and those working from home require assistance with caring for young children. ECE has been highlighted as part of the essential infrastructure of this country for workforce stabilization and economic recovery. The CARES Act, CAA, and American Rescue Plan provided critical enhanced funding for the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), but there is still a need for additional funding and the creation of an Emergency Stabilization Fund to help providers with financial obligations and center modifications. Additionally, child care tax credits could be fully refundable and increased to support families who pay for out-of-home care.
- **Older Americans Act (OAA):** Reauthorized in 2020, the OAA received critical funding increases for the next four fiscal years. Over 11 million older adults and their caregivers rely on OAA programs administered by the nationwide aging services network, including senior centers, healthy aging programs, nutrition, in-home services, transportation, caregiver support, and elder abuse protections. The needs of older adults and people with disabilities, who are most at risk for severe illness and death from COVID-19, should be central to future efforts to alleviate the impacts of the pandemic.

Protect Rights of Immigrants/Refugees

Alameda County is one of the most diverse counties in the nation; more than 1 out of 3 residents are foreign born. The State of California has expanded some critical services beyond federal limits due to clients' immigration history or status. Actions taken and proposed by the previous Presidential Administration that targeted immigrants and refugees are of grave concern to SSA, including:

- **Public Charge:** In 2019, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and Department of Homeland Security released a Final Rule that intends to expand the "public charge" limitation for immigrants seeking residency status. Currently, the public charge designation applies to recipients of cash assistance or long-term care. The Final Rule would have expanded public charge consideration to include SNAP, Medicaid for adults (excluding young adults under the age of 21, and pregnant and post-partum women), the Section 8 Voucher or Project-Based Rental Assistance, or Public Housing. Changes to public charge would not apply to refugees or other humanitarian immigrants, but could apply to immigrants seeking to become lawful permanent residents. An Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) requested feedback regarding public charge. Alameda County supports finalizing the policy in a way that does not penalize immigrants for accessing necessary public services.
- **Refugee Services:** Policies that limit services for refugees are of concern, as SSA administers the Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), Refugee Med-Cal Assistance (RMA), Older Refugee Discretionary Grant, and Social Adjustment programs. Alameda County is a designated "Welcoming County" by Board of Supervisors' resolution, providing a home for thousands of refugees, asylum-seekers, and unaccompanied minors.