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February 16, 2015

The Honorable Mark Leno  
Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee  
California State Capitol  
Sacramento, California 95814

The Honorable Dr. Shirley Weber  
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee  
California State Capitol  
Sacramento, California 95814

**Re: SSI/SSP in the 2015-16 Budget**

Dear Senator Leno and Assemblymember Weber,

California In-Home Supportive Service Consumer Alliance (CICA) represents seniors and people with disabilities throughout the State of California. In advocating for improved lives for those we represent an increase in the monthly Supplemental Security Income and State Supplemental Payments (SSI/SSP) will provide increased ability to purchase healthier foods and live in improved environments.

As you know, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a Federal program designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people who have little or no income to meet their basic needs. The state funded portion of this program is called the State Supplemental Payment (SSP). The Governor's budget is unfortunately silent on the plight of SSI recipients. We are asking the Senate and the Assembly to prioritize funding for SSI/SSP in the 2015-16 budget.

**How SSI/SSP Grant Cuts Pushed 1 Million Californians into Poverty**

In January 2009 the SSI/SSP grant of \$907 a month was worth 100.5 percent of the federal poverty level for a single individual. Since then SSP grants were repeatedly cut and no cost of living adjustments (COLA) were provided. Individual SSI/SSP grants are now worth just 90.7 percent of the federal poverty level, but if these cuts had not occurred, would be worth 106.7 percent of the federal poverty level, according to the California Budget Project. These cuts have pushed more than 1 million blind, aged and disabled Californians below the federal poverty level. This is a significant reason why we have seen our poverty rate skyrocket to the highest in the nation according to the Census Bureau's Supplemental Poverty Measure.

These cuts are being felt statewide, and have caused a new coalition of over 200 organizations called Californians for SSI (CA4SSI) to advocate for increases in SSI/SSP funding. These cuts come at a high cost to communities across the state by forcing SSI/SSP recipients to rely on emergency public services and private networks to meet food, shelter, and health needs.

Past cuts to SSI/SSP have had a great impact on those we represent through the purchasing power of the individual to provide healthier foods and living arrangements. While SSI/SSP started with

providing an adequate ability to purchase food when it first began it did not keep up with the cost of living, thus cause the individual depending on SSI/SSP to choose between healthy foods or power to live in their homes.

### **Who Is Impacted by Low SSI/SSP Grants?**

Nearly 1.3 million blind, aged and disabled Californians rely on the federal/state SSI/SSP program. Nearly two thirds of the caseload is composed of blind and disabled individuals, with about one-third of recipients eligible due to age. More than half the caseload is composed of women.

### **The Magnitude of Cuts to SSI/SSP**

For decades California periodically provided an annual COLA on the total SSI/SSP amount until the SSP COLA was repealed in 2009. Moreover, monthly state contributions to the SSI/SSP grant for individuals have been cut from \$233 to the federal minimum of \$156, a \$77 monthly reduction per person. The state contribution to SSI/SSP grants for couples in January 2009 was \$568 a month but has been reduced to \$396.20, a \$171.80 monthly cut.

In Fiscal Year 2007-8 the state spent \$3.9 billion on the state portion of the SSI grant, after adjusting for inflation according to the CBP. In contrast, the Governor proposes to spend only \$2.5 billion. That is a cut of \$1.4 billion - all absorbed by persons forced to make difficult tradeoffs between food, housing and medicine. In other words, the proposed budget is based on more than \$1 billion in so-called savings that in fact come at a high price by diminishing an essential source of income for more than 1 million Californians.

### **Restore the SSI/SSP Grant Cuts and the COLA**

It is time to reverse these cuts. No person on SSI should be living in poverty or even at the Supplemental Poverty Level. California IHSS Consumer Alliance is requesting that the Legislature restore both the SSP grant cuts and the cost of living adjustment.

Sincerely,



Janie Whiteford  
Chairperson