Not Getting by on SSI

California balanced the budget during the Great Recession on the backs of 1.3 million Californians who were aged, blind, or living with disabilities. SSI was cut by $1 billion annually, plunging individual SSI recipients to just 90% of the federal poverty level. Promises made to restore the grant levels once the economy recovered have not been met.

SSI/SSP grants are so low that they cover the cost of a 1-bedroom apartment and food in only 6 of California’s 58 counties—and far less than that in counties as diverse as Los Angeles and San Benito.

Eight in 10 households with low incomes (below 200% of the federal poverty line) were housing cost-burdened in 2017; more than half of these households spent more than half their income on housing.¹ Restoring the SSP grant cuts and COLA will help low-income seniors and people with disabilities to afford the cost of housing and meet other basic needs.

“I recently relocated to be closer to family and the land where my departed husband is buried. I’m wheelchair-bound and my SSI benefits are lower than they were in Hawaii because California hasn’t increased the Cost Of Living Adjustment. I may have dug my own grave by moving here.”
—Kathy, Eureka, CA

“If we didn’t have extra help from the Food Bank we would starve. Not to mention soap, toothpaste, toilet paper—stuff you need to survive. I’m just a paycheck away from being homeless.”
—Angel, Oakland, CA

“Tavi, Los Angeles, CA

“I’m trying to schedule my meals so that I won’t go hungry and get my medication, and keep going at 85... It’s kind of a hard struggle as we are getting old, and I see it’s going to be harder for the next generations.”
—Ortencia, Oakland, CA

“Ortencia

Policy Asks

No person on SSI should be living in poverty.

RESTORE THE SSP GRANT CUTS AND THE COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT!

¹ California’s Housing Affordability Crisis Hits Renters and Households With the Lowest Incomes the Hardest (calbudgetcenter.org)
IN THE RED

Chart shows amount of average individual SSI/SSP income remaining after rent and food costs by region. Rent alone exceeds income in 27 counties. Rent + food exceeds income in 52 counties. Rent + food + healthcare exceeds income in ALL counties.

Sources:
Rent represents Fair Market Rent by county for a 1-bedroom unit for 2019 from HUD.
Maximum SSI/SSP grant for an individual is $932 effective January 1, 2019. Above graph does not incorporate healthcare, utility or transportation costs.

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