GUEST OPINION

The battle against hunger is heating up in San Francisco

The nation is shifting its responsibility to feed hungry people onto states and cities, and onto nonprofits like the one I lead.

On Oct. 1, millions of dollars in annual CalFresh costs shifted from the federal government to the city of San Francisco. And that's far from being the worst of it.

We will step up. We will feed the people. But it will be a heavy lift.

The damage from what I call the "Big Ugly Bill" is hitting: San Francisco had to use emergency funds to hire 150 city workers just to process the new paperwork to keep CalFresh alive.

And now some 19,300 San Franciscans are at increased risk of losing their CalFresh benefits this fiscal year due to new requirements that they must either work or volunteer to get the food they need.

What outrages me about these unfair work requirements is that unemployed people are already trying so hard to get jobs. The fear of hunger should not be used to make them try harder. This is based on common sense, and on years of research. Work requirements started on June 1, so by now, many people have used up their three-month grace period. As a consequence, Glide will need to serve hundreds more meals per day.

To meet these work requirements, able-bodied adults must be employed, attend school or volunteer for 80 hours a month to keep individual benefits, which go no higher than $306. That could be as little as $3.82 an hour to spend on food. And if you're spending half of your working hours volunteering, that's less time to spend on job applications, search for housing and stabilize your health.

Glide is partnering with the city to become a workfare site for the CalFresh Community Works Program, which will allow people to volunteer 15 to 20 hours a month instead of 80 hours to meet their work requirements. But we don't have enough space to place everyone. We need more solutions. Ordinary San Franciscans need to step up to protect their neighbors from going hungry. We need to ask our members of Congress to pass laws that support families and farmers, and that restore SNAP.



ADAM PARDEE | SFBT

New requirements require some people to volunteer to qualify for government food assistance. But that means they have less time to search for work, critics of the new rules say.

More people – especially children – are going hungry now than during the depths of the pandemic. Last year, 1 in 3 U.S. households with children faced food insecurity. No child should go hungry due to the policy failures of adults. That breaks my heart.

Black and Latino adults with children are almost twice as likely to experience food insecurity as white adults. Many categories of legal immigrants – refugees, asylum-seekers, humanitarian parolees, trafficking survivors and survivors of domestic violence – are no longer eligible for CalFresh.

Bureaucratic barriers to receiving help also increase shame around poverty. That's why Glide's Free Meals program treats people with respect and dignity: The priority is to make everyone feel welcome.

When you help us distribute extra groceries and fund critical social services, you're making a difference to scared, hardworking people who deserve to know where their next meal is coming from.

If we come together to help our neighbors, volunteer at local food programs and demand change, we can keep those lines from getting even longer. I hope you'll be a part of this change with me, because a healthy Glide is a healthy San Francisco.



Gina Fromer is CEO of the Glide Foundation.

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