



February 19, 2023

Governor Gavin Newsom  
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Sacramento, CA 95814

The Hon. \_\_\_\_\_  
Capitol Office, CA State Assembly  
1021 "O" Street, P.O. Box 942849  
Sacramento, CA 94249

Senator \_\_\_\_\_  
Capitol Office, CA State Senate  
1021 "O" Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: EBT Fraud**

Dear All,

I recently read the following article published in the Los Angeles Times on February 8<sup>th</sup>, "Brazen food stamp scammers steal millions from L.A.'s poorest. 'They're hemorrhaging money' " by Rebecca Ellis. I was outraged to learn that aid recipients are having their aid money stolen by organized criminals many of them from outside the country. I am disappointed, to say the least, in the state's response so far.

First of all, why should it take "up to 30 months to upgrade EBT cards"? The article quoted a California Department of Social Services (CDSS) spokesperson, "the upgrade would require 'complex technological and statutory changes' ". Every one of my credit/debit cards has a chip in them. What is the technological problem? The legislature needs to make those statutory changes and appropriate whatever money is needed to upgrade EBT cards. It seems to me that this should be a priority.

Secondly, I was very upset to learn how some of the victims of this fraud are being treated. It shouldn't take weeks or months for them to be reimbursed. I understand that there are protocols that need to be followed, but when the state knows that there is a problem like this, the state should bear the burden of that problem and not foist it on people who are living on the edge. The Governor and legislature need to put in place whatever waivers are needed. If later evidence appears that a reimbursement claim is fraudulent, then deal with that separately. And as an aside, until there is a secure EBT system, maybe CDSS shouldn't be accusing people of "EBT card trafficking" simply because they have been victimized multiple times.

Thirdly and lastly, I am amazed at how leniently the perpetrators of this crime are treated in our "tough on crime" country. The article cited a case where, "All were charged with theft using a fraudulent card, a felony. Eight pleaded no contest and were sentenced to a month of community service and two years' probation. The rest never showed up to court. Several are believed to have returned to Romania." Really?! Why are non-citizens, who appear to have no ties to the local community, not considered flight risks and refused bail? Maybe if it got back to Romania that if caught people risk spending several weeks or months in jail before their case is adjudicated, the criminal organizations would have a more difficult time recruiting people to do this. And, "a month of community service and two years' probation"? How about at least a year in prison. I know that the jails and prisons are crowded, but I am also a supporter of police, prison/jail and bail reform. And one of the reasons I support those things is to make sure that we have the resources and room to arrest, prosecute and hold the people who need holding.

You need to fix this.

Sincerely,

(Print Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

CC: Los Angeles County supervisors