



We need to prioritize people over politics and stand together for SLO families

By Liz Summer

June 26, 2025

In San Luis Obispo County, we believe in building a community where everyone has the opportunity to live with dignity and opportunity regardless of their income or background. Whether it's a child needing a healthy meal, a senior requiring medical care, or a working family striving for stability, we all benefit when our neighbors can thrive too. At United Way of San Luis Obispo County, our mission is to unite people and resources to improve lives and strengthen our community. For more than 67 years, we've worked hand in hand with local partners to help residents meet basic needs and pursue brighter futures.

Today, that future is in jeopardy. A proposal in Congress—H.R. 1, or the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act"—threatens to slash funding for vital programs like Medicaid, SNAP (CalFresh), and the Child and Earned Income Tax Credits. These aren't luxuries. They are lifelines that help families stay housed, nourished, and healthy.

This isn't a partisan debate. It's a matter of human well-being. These programs support our friends, our coworkers, and our loved ones.

If passed, H.R. 1 would have a devastating impact across SLO County:

- Twenty-five percent of SLO's population is on Medi-Cal, according to a 2024 CenCal Health needs assessment.
- More than 31,000 SLO County residents rely on CalFresh, yet more than half of eligible households remain unenrolled, according to the director of homeless services for Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County (CAPSLO).
- More than 4,800 children in our county experience food insecurity, and family homelessness has risen by 81 percent since 2019, according to CAPSLO.

These programs are not handouts—they are investments in people. Medicaid helps individuals stay healthy enough to work. SNAP ensures children can focus in school

instead of going hungry. Tax credits help parents remain employed and manage rising costs.

Consider Maria, a single mother raising her 5-year-old daughter, who requires a special diet and monthly care for chronic asthma. Under this bill, Maria's CalFresh benefits would be slashed in half—just as summer begins and her daughter loses access to free school meals. With rising food needs and shrinking resources, Maria is left to make impossible choices no parent should have to face.

We see the results every day. These supports reduce homelessness, lower emergency room visits, and strengthen our workforce. They are effective, and we cannot afford to lose them.

If H.R. 1 becomes law, we anticipate more residents in our community will reach out to us and other nonprofits in our area searching for assistance with food, shelter, and medical care. Our local nonprofits are already doing what we can. Removing federal support would only deepen the crisis, especially as inflation continues to strain everyone's budget.

This bill risks undoing years of progress and pushing families further into hardship. And it could affect anyone. A sudden illness, job loss, or caregiving responsibility can leave any family in need. This is about more than policy—it's about people.

We urge every reader to contact their congressional representatives today. Tell them:

"I'm deeply concerned about the impact of H.R. 1 on my community. These cuts are too deep, too fast, and too dangerous. We need solutions that support—not punish—working families, children, and seniors."

Find your representative at congress.gov/members/find-your-member.

United Way of San Luis Obispo County will continue to advocate for policies that promote education, financial stability, and health so all can thrive—because when one family succeeds, our entire community grows stronger.

But we can't do it alone. Your voice matters.

Together, we can ensure our leaders prioritize people over politics and protect the programs that help our neighbors thrive. Δ

Liz Summer is the CEO of United Way of San Luis Obispo County and a longtime Central Coast leader. Send comments in response to letters@newtimesslo.com.