

AUGUST 2024

News...

from the desk of
California State Treasurer Fiona Ma, CPA



WELCOME LETTER

Dear Friends,

August 14th will mark the first national ABLÉ Savings Day. Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts allow people with disabilities to save money and accumulate wealth without jeopardizing eligibility for benefit programs, such as Medicaid or SSI. I'm proud to serve as Chair of California's ABLÉ (CalABLE) plan and I hope that you will join me on this inaugural ABLÉ Savings Day to recognize the benefit ABLÉ savings plans afford our fellow residents who are disabled in reaching their full financial potential. Please turn to page 4 to learn more about CalABLE and how it is helping Americans living with disabilities achieve more independence than ever.

This month's newsletter also highlights the CalAccount Market Feasibility Assessment (Assessment) that my office recently submitted to the California Legislature. This report looks at the feasibility of implementing the CalAccount Program, which would be designed to protect consumers who lack access to traditional banking services from predatory, discriminatory, and costly alternatives, and to offer state residents access to a voluntary, zero-fee, zero-penalty, federally insured transaction account. Please turn to page 3 to learn more about the Assessment and next steps.

Lastly, be sure to check out the In the Community section on page 5, where you can see a picture of me with the 2024 World's Ugliest Dog, Wild Thang. I was honored to join the panel of judges for this year's famed World's Ugliest Dog Competition at the Sonoma-Marin County Fair.

In Peace and Friendship,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Fiona Ma".

Fiona Ma, CPA
California State Treasurer

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Past performance does not guarantee future results. Investment return and principal value may fluctuate, so account value in State Treasurer's Office savings programs at the time of the withdrawal may be higher or lower than the amount invested.

This material is not intended to provide, and should not be relied on, for tax, legal or financial advice.

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<https://www.treasurer.ca.gov>

ASK FIONA

Dear Fiona,

With the close of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), what other resources are available to help me cover the cost of my internet bill. I'm low-income and I'm afraid I won't be able to pay my bill now without the ACP discount.

Sincerely,

Hannah

Dear Hannah,

Due to a lack of additional funding from Congress, the Affordable Connectivity Program ended effective June 1, 2024.

The federal government has an alternate program that can provide a discount to some households. The [Lifeline Program](#) offers up to \$9.25 per month off of phone and internet plans.

Many internet providers also offer their own discount programs for low-income households. [California's Broadband for All](#) program connects households, schools, and businesses to affordable internet options, computer offers, and digital skills training. You can utilize the program's online [tool](#) to locate affordable internet services in your area.

[United Ways of California](#) can also help you sign up for low-cost internet services. Text INTERNET to 211-211 to get screened for all low-cost offers OR use the [self-screening calculator](#) to determine your eligibility.

Sincerely,

Fiona

Have a Question for the Treasurer?



Send emails to:

AskFiona@treasurer.ca.gov, with the subject line: "Ask Fiona"

Address letters to:

California State Treasurer Fiona Ma
Post Office Box 942809
Sacramento, CA 94209-0001



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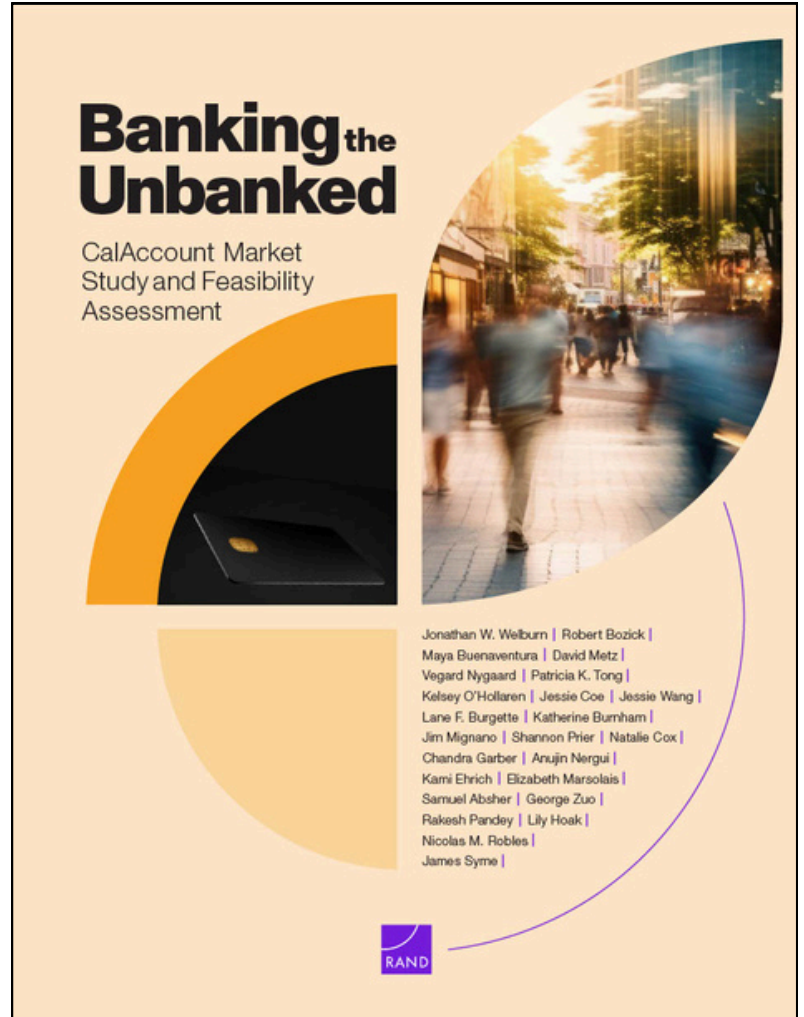
Banking the Unbanked

CalAccount Blue Ribbon Commission Issues Feasibility Study to the Legislature

California, known for its economic prosperity and innovation, also faces significant financial inclusion challenges. Among these challenges is the issue of unbanked and underbanked households—those with little to no banking relationships.

According to the 2021 FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households, 5.1 percent of households in California were unbanked, while 13.9 percent were underbanked. In California, low-income and minority families are disproportionately affected by the lack of banking access. These households often rely on alternative financial services that can be costly and less secure, which exacerbates financial instability and inequality.

The California Public Banking Option Act, enacted in October 2021, established the [CalAccount Blue Ribbon Commission](#) (Commission), with Treasurer Ma serving as its chair. The Commission was required to deliver a market analysis to the California Legislature to determine the feasibility of implementing the CalAccount Program, which would be designed to offer Californians access to a voluntary, zero-fee, zero-penalty, federally insured transaction account, known as a CalAccount, and related payment services at no cost to accountholders.



On July 1, 2024, the [CalAccount Market Study and Feasibility Assessment](#) (Study), developed by the RAND Corporation, was submitted to the Legislature. The report found that unbanked and underbanked Californians who elect to participate in the CalAccount Program, if created, would have the potential to save from \$41 to \$185 per household by avoiding banking fees. For low-income households, these savings could have significant impacts. It also found that the CalAccount Program could significantly reduce unbanked disparities by race and ethnicity.

The Commission took public comments concerning the Study until July 18, 2024. Next steps for the Commission include overseeing the addition of public comments to the Assessment and determining the format for its own report to the Legislature now that the Study has been completed.

"While much work remains and additional issues need further exploration, it's evident that CalAccount could be a game-changer, addressing wealth disparities across demographic groups and paving the way for a more equitable California."

— State Treasurer Fiona Ma, CPA

National ABLE Savings Day

Financial Empowerment for People with Disabilities



On August 14, California will join the celebration of National ABLE Savings Day! The California State Treasurer's Office is proud of its role in supporting financial empowerment for people with disabilities and is excited to announce new opportunities to support potential account holders.

Imagine the challenge of navigating life without savings or investments. For millions of Americans with disabilities, having more than \$2,000 can impact eligibility for supplemental income, healthcare, food, and house assistance. Losing eligibility for public benefits, such as Medi-Cal and Supplemental Social Security Income, can mean living with debilitating financial constraints on top of a disability. This not only can cause poor spending choices, but also restricts the ability of the individual to fulfill their American dream.

Thankfully, back in 2014, the United States Congress passed a piece of legislation called The Stephen Beck, Jr. Achieving a Better Life Experience Act (ABLE Act) and it was signed into law by President Barack Obama. These accounts allow individuals to save and invest money without harming their ability to receive public benefits. They also help build independence and confidence, encourage employment, and improve quality of life.



"My CalABLE account has given me support, reassurance, freedom, and independence to be able to start to invest in myself and my life moving forward."

— Chelsee, CalABLE account holder

California's ABLE plan, [CalABLE](#), launched in 2018. In just six years, there are countless stories of the life-changing impacts CalABLE account holders have experienced. More than 11,000 individuals with disabilities have collectively saved over \$150 million in a CalABLE account. Year-over-year growth shows a 39 percent increase in assets, 21.5 percent increase in accounts, and 29 percent increase in contributions. With an average account balance of more than \$12,000, CalABLE accounts are empowering many to save for needed benefits.

This month, ABLE plans nationwide are celebrating the first ABLE Savings Day to help others learn about how important these programs are to Americans living with disabilities. CalABLE is offering an [ABLE to Save webinar](#) on August 14 at 2:00 pm PST.

Also, from August 14 to September 1, 2024, CalABLE is offering a special promotion to the first 100 individuals who open a new account! For these 100 individuals, CalABLE will make a contribution of \$50 into their accounts. For more information about this promotion, please email CalABLE@treasurer.ca.gov.

During the month of August, and every other month of the year, CalABLE strives to help as many individuals as possible achieve financial independence!

CalABLE's Eligibility Expands in 2026

CalABLE will soon have the ability to reach millions more people. Assembly Bill 339 (Irwin), which was signed into law last year, raises the age of onset of disability from before age 26 to before age 46. This expansion, which goes into effect in 2026, allows a broader range of individuals with disabilities to open and contribute to ABLE accounts. The expanded eligibility puts CalABLE at the forefront of promoting even more financial empowerment, inclusion, and independence for individuals with disabilities, namely disabled veterans and individuals who become disabled later in life.

In the Community

Treasurer Judges Lovable Canines at the 2024 World's Ugliest Dog Contest!



June 21st (Petaluma) - The 2024 Sonoma-Marín County Fair in Petaluma saw a unique blend of charm and humor as State Treasurer Fiona Ma joined the panel of judges for the famed World's Ugliest Dog Competition. This year's winner, an 8-year-old Pekingesé named Wild Thang, charmed the judges with his quirky appearance and heartwarming story of resilience.

Wild Thang, owned by Ann Lewis from Coos Bay, Oregon, has competed in the contest five times, finally clinching the top spot this year. The competition celebrated the unique beauty of dogs that don't fit traditional standards. Treasurer Ma expressed her admiration for Wild Thang, saying, "His perseverance and unique charm truly touched our hearts. He deserved to win."

The event also drew enthusiastic support from young attendees, including one young fan who aptly remarked, "Ugly has four letters, but so does cute," capturing the spirit of the competition perfectly.

The fair highlighted the importance of pet adoption, with many contestants being rescue dogs. Wild Thang's journey from a distemper disease survivor to a beloved contest winner aims to raise awareness about the importance of pet vaccinations and rescue efforts.

State Treasurer Fiona Ma (right) joyfully holds Wild Thang alongside his proud fur-parent Ann Lewis (left) as they celebrate his victory at the 2024 World's Ugliest Dog Contest. *(Photo Credit: Executive Office, State Treasurer's Office)*

UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine Honored with Special Resolution on its 75th Anniversary

June 29th (Sacramento) - State Treasurer Ma celebrated the 75th anniversary of the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, which has achieved pioneering advancements in veterinary education, research, and clinical care.

During the 75th Anniversary Gala, Treasurer Ma presented a resolution to Mark Stetter, Dean of UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. The resolution celebrates the school's pioneering role in veterinary science and its global impact on animal and human health. Dean Stetter reflected on the school's journey from humble beginnings to its current status as an international leader in veterinary medicine.

The event, emceed by Olympic champion Brian Boitano, featured inspiring speeches, performances, and touching stories of appreciative animal owners and the impact the school has had on their animals' lives. Over the past 75 years, UC Davis has developed vaccines for livestock diseases, pioneered stem cell treatments, and treated over 50,000 patients annually at its Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital.

Dean Stetter emphasized the school's commitment to future innovations in veterinary science, aiming to improve animal and human health further. The celebrations highlighted the school's past achievements and its vision for continued excellence and impact in the years ahead.



Above: State Treasurer Fiona Ma (center) presents a ceremonial resolution to Dean Mark Stetter to commemorate the school's 75th anniversary. Also pictured are Sherelle Li (far left) and emcee Brian Boitano (far right). *(Photo Credit: UC Davis Vet Med Alumni)*

In the Community

AltaMed Health Delivers Health Care Services Throughout Los Angeles and Orange Counties



July 10th (Los Angeles) – State Treasurer Ma toured AltaMed Health Services Facilities, the largest unaffiliated nonprofit Federally Qualified Health Center in California. AltaMed provides comprehensive care for over 239,000 patients in Los Angeles and Orange counties through an array of health and human services, including primary healthcare, dental care, mental health services, specialized pediatric and adolescent care programs, Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), chronic care programs, HIV and AIDS services, youth services, and community outreach and health education.

Left: State Treasurer Ma meets with Alta Med Health Services leadership and staff. (Photo Credit: Executive Office, State Treasurer's Office)

Touring the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District's Water Delivery System

July 11th (Lake Elsinore) – The Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District (EVMWD) provided State Treasurer Ma with a tour of the important water facilities and projects that help provide water and sewer services to approximately 159,000 people within the cities of Lake Elsinore, Canyon Lake, Murrieta, Wildomar and unincorporated areas, with one third of its parcels located in disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities.

Right: Elsinore Eddie educates State Treasurer Ma about the different sources of water that the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District uses to delivery high quality services to residents of the Elsinore Valley. (Photo Credit: Executive Office, State Treasurer's Office)



West Hollywood Chamber Puts the Progress Back in Progressive



July 27th (West Hollywood) – State Treasurer Ma participated in a panel discussion with the West Hollywood Chamber of Commerce. The panel, titled Economics for Small Businesses: Balancing Equity, Sustainability, and Economic Growth in 2024 and Beyond, discussed ways to bridge gaps so that government, businesses, residents, and workers can progress together. Other panelists included Stephen Cheung, President and CEO of the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation; Jacob Shaw, local small business owner; and Dr. Avandihar Subrahmanyam, UCLA Professor of Finance.

Above: State Treasurer Ma joined West Hollywood Chamber (Weho) leaders (from left to right) Genevieve Morrill, Chamber President; David Wood, Chamber Chair; Craig Berberian, Founder & Managing Partner, Empire Property Group; and Jorge Nariño, Levin-Nariño Architects. (Photo Credit: Willa Cutolo)