

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 7, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

The undersigned members of the House of Representatives urge the Department of Agriculture (Department) to act swiftly to ensure children have access to nutritious food during these difficult economic times. Specifically, we urge the Department to renew waivers to enable the implementation of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and to waive the Area Eligibility Requirement during the entirety of school year 2020-2021.

As you know, Congress authorized the use of these waivers in the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act*.¹ Schools and non-profit partners across the country have utilized these waivers to continue providing meals to children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The flexibility to operate SFSP and SSO is essential for schools to continue serving children when school buildings are not accessible, which will continue to be the case in many parts of the country during the coming school year. These waivers also provide critical administrative relief for already over-burdened school staff and facilitate the implementation of health and safety measures by limiting the contact required during meal service.

Simply put, without these flexibilities, some schools will be unable to continue providing meals for students next year.

In March and April 2020, approximately one in four adults ages 18-64 with children younger than 19 reported food insecurity in their household during the previous month.² Rates of food insecurity are significantly higher in Black households, with approximately 37 percent of Black households with children reporting food insecurity in March and April 2020 compared to approximately 18 percent of white households.³ It is unconscionable that the Department would fail to utilize all of its available authority to ensure that children can continue to receive the nutritious meals they need to learn next year.

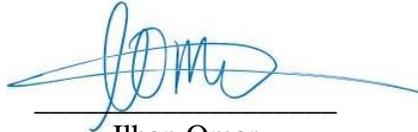
¹ 29 U.S.C. § 2601.

² Elaine Waxman, *Many Families Are Struggling to Put Food on the Table. We Have to Do More.*, Urban Wire (May 7, 2020), <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/many-families-are-struggling-put-food-table-we-have-do-more>.

³ *Id.*

We therefore urge your swift action to extend these waivers in the school meal programs. Please contact Maria Martirosyan at Maria.Martirosyan@mail.house.gov with any questions. Thank you for your attention this urgent matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Ilhan Omar
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Chellie Pingree
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
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MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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August 26, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As the 2020-2021 school year gets underway, schools may be struggling to implement new methods of teaching while simultaneously figuring out how to provide meals to vulnerable students. During these challenging times, we urge you to review the child nutrition program flexibilities allowed under the law and implement those flexibilities as quickly as possible.

We know the flexibilities utilized at the beginning of the pandemic helped schools provide meals to families in need. With a new school year starting amid the pandemic, it is critical that schools have the flexibility they need to continue providing meals to their students. This flexibility is particularly important since many school districts have announced a variety of plans, including modified in-person classes and meal services, hybrid education, and in some cases continued remote learning. Given the broad range of plans, we should ensure the federal programs that help feed students are flexible, easy to operate, and free of unnecessary burdens.

Therefore, we ask USDA to review the program flexibilities currently available within the child nutrition programs and expeditiously implement much needed flexibilities. Additionally, these program flexibilities should be tied to pandemic-related needs, which is why we also request that you implement the flexibilities for a specific length of time so schools aren't faced with uncertainty and burdensome paperwork and bureaucracy.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this issue.

Sincerely,



Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member



Glenn "GT" Thompson
Member of Congress



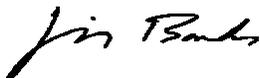
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Member of Congress



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Troy Balderson
Member of Congress



Chris Jacobs
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 7, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
Jamie L. Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We, the undersigned Members of Congress, implore you to exercise your existing authority under the *Families First Coronavirus Relief Act* to expeditiously extend all waivers available to schools to provide meals to children during this pandemic. Specifically, we urge extension of the waivers that allow implementation of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO), including area eligibility waivers, through the 2020-21 school year.

Doing so will prevent hunger among the 4,240,786 California children who were certified to receive free and reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) during the 2019-20 school year, over a million of whom live in families that do not receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. While Congress is working on additional legislation to provide relief to Americans impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the need to extend these waivers is urgent. Schools across the nation are opening now without certainty about how or if they will be able to provide meals to children.

In times of insecurity, one thing we count on is that children receive the nutrition necessary to meet their basic needs. Ensuring access to NSLP during the pandemic will not only reduce hunger and improve other health outcomes. Most immediately, addressing food insecurity is posited to lessen the risk of developmental delays and improve outcomes such as children's ability to focus and perform academically.¹

We appreciate that the Department of Agriculture extended the waivers on the SFSP and SSO, and the thresholds to provide meals to all children through August 31, 2020. However, once schools reopen for classes, whether remotely or in person, they will be required to go back to the rules under the National School Program and the School Breakfast Program unless you act. This creates a tremendous challenge when schools may be providing meals in a variety of formats, where they may be serving meals in the classroom at the same time, they are sending meals home for students not present in the school building.

¹ East, Chole N. (2016). "The Effect of Food Stamps on Children's Health: Evidence from Immigrants' Changing Eligibility." Denver, CO: The University of Denver. Retrieved from <http://www.sole-jole.org/17153.pdf>

The ability to prevent hunger among children is critical to education. For many students, school meals may be the only security they experience. As the pandemic continues to disrupt the lives of American families, it is incumbent upon us to do all we can to ensure students can continue to learn free of the pain, indignity and distraction of hunger.

All parents worry about their children, and now, more than ever before seen in this generation, the need is critical. We urge you to take immediate action to protect the health, well-being and future of our nation's students.

Sincerely,



Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress

/s/

Paul Cook
Member of Congress

/s/

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

/s/

Scott Peters
Member of Congress

/s/

Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

/s/

J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress

/s/

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

/s/

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

/s/

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

/s/

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

/s/

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

/s/

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

/s/

Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress

/s/

Jim Costa
Member of Congress

/s/

Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

/s/

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

/s/

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

/s/

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

/s/

Mike Levin
Member of Congress

/s/

Josh Harder
Member of Congress

/s/

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

/s/

Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress

/s/

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

/s/

Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress