

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August XX, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We appreciate the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services (USDA FNS) efforts to ensure children have access to nutritious food during the COVID-19 pandemic through the issuance of guidance and nationwide waivers of school meal program requirements this past school year and this summer. However, due to COVID-19 related challenges, schools are struggling to prepare for meal service for the upcoming academic year. We write to urge USDA to extend a number of school meal program waivers for the entire 2020-2021 school year or until regular school operations are restored.

COVID-19 has forced many schools around the country to move to hybrid or virtual instruction models. For millions of children, school closures and learning from home can mean losing the healthy school meals they depend on to thrive. As unemployment claims continue to rise and more families feel the economic impact of the crisis, millions more students will be facing hunger and will need school-provided meals.

We were pleased that USDA extended a number of waivers for school meal program regulatory requirements until the end of the 2020-2021 school year, including the meal pattern requirement, the parent/guardian pickup requirement, the congregate feeding requirement, and the mealtime requirement. However, we urge you to also extend the following waivers for the entire 2020-2021 school year to give states, schools and FNS staff the certainty and flexibility they need to ensure children have access to meals during this crisis:

- Area Eligibility Waiver
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) Waivers
- Afterschool Activity Waiver
- Unexpected School Closures Waiver
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Parent Pick-Up Waiver

Additionally, we urge you to issue waivers for requests that USDA has already received that strengthen or expand child nutrition benefits. States, schools, and community stakeholders have been on the frontline responding to the crisis and have the best understanding of the challenges and barriers they face. The waivers that states have submitted are critical to easing administrative burdens and allowing meals to be served. These should be made available nationwide to allow a streamlined administrative process as well as continued oversight.

American families face many disruptions and worries going into this coming academic year, and hunger should not be one of them. We encourage you to move quickly to ensure states have all the tools and security they need to respond to this continuing public health crisis and schoolchildren have enough to eat this upcoming school year.

Sincerely,