

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 8, 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 meals through the current school year. Specifically, we urge the Department to extend waivers enabling the implementation of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and the waiving of the Area Eligibility Requirement for the entirety of 2020-2021 School Year.

As you know, the waiver authority provided by Congress and the resulting waivers issued by the Department have proven crucial for schools and non-profit partners to serve nutritious meals during the COVID-19 pandemic. With schools adapting to completely virtual and hybrid plans, food service staff will undoubtedly need to rely on program flexibilities this year. Without the waivers, there will be lasting effects on the well-being and academic success of students.¹ A U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey found that by mid-July 2020, as many as 17 million children were living in households in which they were not receiving enough to eat.² The number of children going hungry across this country will undoubtedly increase if the Department fails to fully utilize its available authority.

On August 31, the Department granted an extension of these waivers through December 31, 2020. While we appreciate this extension and the immediate flexibility it provides, this is only a temporary solution that leaves school officials and food service operators without the necessary flexibilities to serve meals to all students in need throughout the 2020-2021 School Year. Additionally, the Department's decision to extend the waivers until the end of the year came at the eleventh hour, resulting in unnecessary uncertainty and confusion for food service staff and the families they serve.

On August 31, 2020, you claimed that the Department may not have the funding to extend the waivers past December 31, 2020.³ We believe that the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and

¹ Elaine Waxman, *Many Families Are Struggling to Put Food on the Table. We Have to Do More*, (May 7, 2020) <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/many-families-are-struggling-put-food-table-we-have-do-more>.

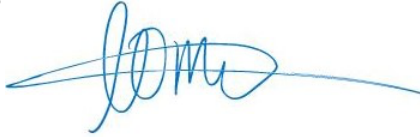
² Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Tracking the COVID-19 Recession's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships*, (August 13, 2020) <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-recessions-effects-on-food-housing-and-employment-hardships>.

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Secretary Perdue makes an announcement about USDA's school meals program as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic*, Facebook (August 31, 2020) <https://www.facebook.com/USDA/videos/vb.108879087298/640017843576341/?type=2&theater>.

Other Extensions Act (H.R. 8337) removes any possible ambiguity about the authority or funding available to the Department on this matter, and therefore urge your immediate 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 to this urgent matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Joyce Beatty
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