



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

June 2, 2020

**Re: Extending Child Nutrition Program Flexibilities
Supporting Legislation Making Critical Child Anti-Hunger Investments**

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As leading statewide organizations working to end hunger in California, we are writing in unity to implore your urgent response to prevent child hunger. The COVID-19 crisis stands to increase food insecurity throughout the nation, making it harder for families to access the food they need. A recent nationally representative survey found that, “two in five households with mothers with children 12 and under were food insecure. In almost one in five households of mothers with children age 12 and under, the children were experiencing food insecurity.”¹ As we head into summer, and families continue to feel the economic effects of the crisis, we can expect that, without additional action from USDA and the President, past inequities in food access will persist with low-income families with children being at greater risk for food insecurity.

The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Nutrition Programs are critical to the health of California’s youth, preventing hunger and providing nutrition. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and meals provided through child nutrition programs are especially important for students whose families are economically disadvantaged. [In California, nearly 60% of all students are eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals.](#) For some of these students, these programs may provide the only meals that they eat each day.

We appreciate the USDA’s approval of California’s Pandemic EBT plan and your [May 15th Nationwide extension of the Non-Congregate, Parent Pick Up and Meal Time waivers through August 31, 2020.](#) The availability of meals through these programs has become even more crucial as millions of Californians have found themselves suddenly unemployed amid the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. The work by the California Department of Education (CDE), school districts, food service employees, community partners and other stakeholders in converting school and summer meal programs to grab-and-go models has been a bright spot in the effort to prevent hunger during these unprecedented times.

¹ Bauer, Lauren. The Hamilton Project. May 6, 2020.

https://www.hamiltonproject.org/blog/the_covid_19_crisis_has_already_left_too_many_children_hungry_in_america

The action of May 15th was necessary but not sufficient, however, to prevent a summer hunger crisis and protect public health. [Currently only 17% of children eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals receive Summer meals](#), and even fewer children will have access to food this summer, without the ability for programs to operate under all current flexibilities. until September 30, 2020. Here are just a few of the remaining issues:

- Many summer programs and summer schools have been cut or canceled. Those that are allowed to remain open will need to do so in a way that places limitations on the number of children they can serve. Ensuring providers can distribute meals without programming is therefore critical under the current conditions.
- The rapidly [deteriorating economic conditions, disproportionately experienced by communities of color](#), underscore how many children are newly hungry but whose entitlement to aid will not be captured in area eligibility determinations for summer 2020.
- Even in a normal year, many school districts do not return until after August 31. Due to the pandemic, many are now planning for fall school year returns that are delayed, staggered, or make other modifications that require flexibility into September.

We therefore request that the USDA extend all state and nationwide waivers issued to date, including but not limited to After School Activity, Area Eligibility, Meal Times, Non-Congregate Feeding, Parent/Guardian Meal Pick Up, and Unanticipated School Closures until September 30, 2020. This will reduce administrative burden on USDA and state agencies from individual approvals. We are aware that the California Department of Education has made similar requests to extend waivers, which we urge USDA to approve and continue the current flexibilities vital to safely feed our children.

In addition to this request, we hope you will encourage the President to support proposals to increase anti-hunger benefits to the [1.9 million children whose families rely on SNAP to prevent hunger](#). The Senate is considering H.R. 6800, legislation that [passed with bi-partisan votes in the House of Representatives](#). It would make significant investments in SNAP [proven to make life-changing improvements in children's lives](#). It would also extend the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program through the summer to ensure families have enough resources to buy food and [provide much-needed economic stimulus](#). **We urge your immediate support for the Senate to pass and President to sign H.R. 6800 into law.**

No child in our great nation should go hungry. Thank you for your work to prevent hunger, especially among children, during this Public Health Emergency and beyond. We look forward to your favorable consideration of these requests at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Jessica Bartholow
Western Center on Law &
Poverty



Melissa Cannon
California Food Policy
Advocates



Andrew Cheyne
California Association of
Food Banks

CC: Brandon Lipps, Undersecretary, Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services
Pam Miller, Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service
Kristen Hyatt, Assistant Deputy Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service
Jessica Shaheen, Associate Administrator, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
Angela Kline, Director, Policy and Program Development Division, Child Nutrition Programs
Jesus Mendoza, Regional Administrator, Western Regional Office