



July 23, 2020

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

**RE: Request to Urgently Address Child Hunger**

We are writing to again request your urgent action to address the unprecedented and dangerous levels of hunger and food insecurity among children in California and across the country. Specifically, we call on you to take administrative action to extend several critical child nutrition waivers to allow children to access to much-needed meals served by schools and community organizations and to ask President Donald J. Trump to support legislation that would extend Pandemic EBT through the 2020-21 school year, boost SNAP benefits by 15%, and provide additional fiscal and hunger relief to families.

We appreciate the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) efforts to reduce childhood hunger during the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis, including your approval of California's P-EBT plan and recent extensions of some child nutrition waivers, yet the actions taken to date have insufficiently addressed the need. In mid-July, an astonishing 27.9 percent of California adults who live with children struggled with household food insecurity. Black and Latinx adults living with children experienced even higher rates of household food insecurity (36% and 33.7%, respectively) during that same time.<sup>1</sup> In addition, these nutrition supports have already expired or are set to soon at the very time COVID-19 infections are surging throughout the state and in many parts of the country.<sup>2</sup>

Schools and public health officials are making the very difficult, but necessary decision to begin the 2020-21 School Year with distance and hybrid learning models. At the same time, continued stay-at-home orders are further reducing access to nutrition programs and community anti-hunger services for children and the adults in their families. All of this, combined with the highest rates of food inflation increases since 2008,<sup>3</sup> indicate that, without necessary accommodations and expansions made to our existing child nutrition programs, including extensions of benefits and supports provided to date, the rates of food insecurity among families with children will climb even higher.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/state-food-insecurity.html>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/here-are-the-states-where-covid-19-is-increasing>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/food-inflation>  
<https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/inflation/food-inflation-in-the-united-states/>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/20/millions-of-kids-may-lose-out-on-free-meals-as-they-return-to-school-374587>

To reduce the chance of hunger and lifelong harm to children who experience it, we ask the USDA to take bold and urgent action. First, we urge you to encourage President Donald J. Trump to support legislation that would significantly reduce hunger among children by, including but not limited to: extending Pandemic EBT; boosting SNAP benefits by 15%; raising the minimum SNAP benefit to \$30 a month; pausing all administrative actions that would cut SNAP benefits or limit SNAP eligibility; extending WIC COVID-19 waivers; and supporting the SERVE and CARRY Act that would provide additional benefits to families through a restaurant benefit. We urge you support providing needed financial relief to families such as by extending Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit, providing stimulus payments inclusive of ITIN filers, and providing fiscal relief to state and local governments.

Second, we call on the USDA to enact the following flexibilities, which are urgently needed to support learning and health as well as prevent and, if not possible, reduce harm and pain of hunger. Waivers we are asking to be authorized through the 2020-2021 school year include: an expansion of the nationwide non-congregate feeding waiver to include the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO); the area eligibility waiver for SFSP and SSO; and the Afterschool Activity Requirement waiver for the Afterschool Meal and Snack Programs available through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). We are also asking that the USDA to reverse the denial of California's request to waive the activity requirement beyond June 30, 2020 and the denial of California's request to serve adults in the household of children receiving a non-congregate meal. Finally, we ask you to allow programs providing meals through the Summer Food Service Program or Seamless Summer Option to also serve afterschool meals and snacks.

We know you share our sense of urgency in this matter and that you understand the importance of preventing hunger for children and we thank you for your timely consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



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Western Center on Law &  
Poverty



Melissa Cannon  
California Food Policy  
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Andrew Cheyne  
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CC: Brandon Lipps, Undersecretary, Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services  
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