

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 18, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced schools around the country to shut down and shift to an online curriculum, which has reduced the number of healthy and regular meals many children receive. We thank the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for its flexibility granting waivers of school meal program requirements this past school year and this summer; however, as the COVID-19 crisis continues, the number of food insecure children is growing at an alarming rate, bringing into reality the long-term dangers of leaving children malnourished. We write to request that the USDA renew waivers enabling the continued implementation of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO), while also waiving the Area Eligibility Requirement in those programs, throughout the national emergency declaration during the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic.

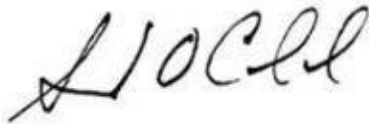
Ensuring that all children have consistent access to fresh and nutritious food year-round is critical for kids to grow up to be healthy and prepared for any career they choose, including the military. Food insecurity can signal a lack of access to such foods, and it is predicted that 1 in 4 children will be food insecure in 2020. The health problems caused by food insecurity in young people can impact their future ability to serve in the armed forces. Children who live in food insecure households can experience malnutrition; may be more at risk for obesity; and are also at higher risk for chronic illness, asthma, and iron-deficiency anemia. In addition to physical problems that food insecurity may help create, it can also lead to lower overall academic performance.

SFSP and SSO are vital in supporting children's access to healthy food, especially when the future of our school operations is unclear. Some schools have already delayed the start to the school year, causing a gap between expiring waivers and when schools begin. The USDA must extend SFSP and SSO waivers during the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic to fill the gap between the end of the summer program until schools are able to safely and fully reopen for instruction. Schools are also facing uncertainty in planning and budgeting for the coming year; renewing these waivers for the duration of the national emergency declaration would provide the stability and certainty that schools need to make plans to best serve the unique needs of their local communities. By allowing SFSP and SSO to be used to feed children through the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic we can better provide our educators and communities with the

additional flexibilities needed to serve meals to children, while reducing administrative burdens, and allowing efficient meal distribution for families and schools with plans for remote or hybrid learning days.

As U.S. military veterans, we understand that the security of our nation is directly tied to the strength of our people. We must act now to allow necessary innovations, made possible by these waivers, to our nation's school and summer meals programs, which will help ensure that our youngest generation is on track for a secure and prosperous future. We thank USDA for all its work to help keep children fed and we ask that you continue doing everything you can for the remainder of the summer and the upcoming school year to support the future of our nation's readiness.

Sincerely,



Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress



Don Bacon
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress

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