August 7, 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 food during these difficult economic times. Specifically, we urge the Department to renew waivers to enable the implementation of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and to waive the Area Eligibility Requirement during the entirety of school year 2020-2021.

As you know, Congress authorized the use of these waivers in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. Schools and non-profit partners across the country have utilized these waivers to continue providing meals to children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The flexibility to operate SFSP and SSO is essential for schools to continue serving children when school buildings are not accessible, which will continue to be the case in many parts of the country during the coming school year. These waivers also provide critical administrative relief for already over-burdened school staff and facilitate the implementation of health and safety measures by limiting the contact required during meal service.

Simply put, without these flexibilities, some schools will be unable to continue providing meals for students next year.

In March and April 2020, approximately one in four adults ages 18-64 with children younger than 19 reported food insecurity in their household during the previous month. Rates of food insecurity are significantly higher in Black households, with approximately 37 percent of Black households with children reporting food insecurity in March and April 2020 compared to approximately 18 percent of white households. It is unconscionable that the Department would fail to utilize all of its available authority to ensure that children can continue to receive the nutritious meals they need to learn next year.

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2 Elaine Waxman, Many Families Are Struggling to Put Food on the Table. We Have to Do More., Urban Wire (May 7, 2020), https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/many-families-are-struggling-put-food-table-we-have-do-more.
3 Id.
We therefore urge your swift 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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Ilhan Omar
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Chellie Pingree
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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