

EMANUEL CLEAVER, II  
FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE  
NATIONAL SECURITY, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT,  
AND MONETARY POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE  
CHAIRMAN  
HOUSING, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,  
AND INSURANCE SUBCOMMITTEE



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives

FIFTH DISTRICT, MISSOURI  
HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE  
MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS  
HTTPS://CLEAVER.HOUSE.GOV

April 19, 2020

Secretary Sonny Perdue  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave SW,  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Purdue,

The effects of COVID-19 are felt by many, yet our food safety net system is being challenged daily as the virus continues to spread within all our local communities. In Missouri, children are home, as schools have dutifully been ordered closed by our Governor. However, our brave and essential, frontline food service workers are reporting to duty to ensure that the kids that would receive free or reduce price meals will continue to receive the nutritious meal. As you know, the Food and Nutrition Services mission is to increase food security and reduce hunger by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthful diet and nutrition education in a way that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

Thankfully, school districts across my district have stepped up, continuing operations to provide meals for our students in need. However, although the school districts are following all federal and local health, some school districts have still been faced with staff members being exposed to COVID-19. These exposure scenarios have caused major disruptions in food accessibility within our community, causing numerous sites to shut down and discard precious non-perishable food products.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the continuation of these programs, during the upswing of our local pandemic curve, creates unnecessary exposure risks for frontline workers and recipients, when there are alternatives available that may prevent further exposure risks.

It is for this reason that I write today in support of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) request to engage the USDA Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program, made available through the passage of the Families First Coronavirus Response (CARES) Act of 2020. As you are aware, by engaging this emergency effort, families who already receive EBT will simply receive an increase in funds as an alternative to the district's providing these food distribution programs. Furthermore, this enactment will allow families that otherwise depend on these services but don't already receive EBT benefits to sign-up and utilize this non-contact method for food access. Missouri is primed for this enactment, as the state has previously run a pilot program using similar methods this past summer, within our rural communities, that yielded great success and accessibility. Again, the immediate approval of MO DESE's plan would provide much needed relief to both our frontline food service workers and strengthen support for local grocery stores. Thank you as always for your attention and we hope to receive a swift response.

Warmest Regards,

Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Member of Congress

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kansascity.com/news/coronavirus/article241621716.html>  
<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/lees-summit-r-7-says-nutrition-services-worker-tests-positive-for-covid-19/ar-BB12awKD>  
<https://www.kshb.com/news/coronavirus/kcps-suspends-meal-distribution-after-employee-tests-positive-for-covid-19>