

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 27, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As school districts and community-based providers across Pennsylvania prepare for the 2020-2021 school year, we urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to extend the child nutrition program waivers authorized through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which are set to expire on August 31, 2020. These waivers have been critical in supporting meal access for children and have provided critical flexibilities to schools and childcare organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to exacerbate hunger and food insecurity across the Commonwealth. Prior to COVID-19, approximately 1.5 million Pennsylvanians were food insecure, including 437,000 children. As of May 2020, this figure had increased by more than 200,000 individuals. With hundreds of thousands more Pennsylvanians experiencing food insecurity, local food banks reported an average increase in demand of 65 percent. As economic conditions change rapidly in Pennsylvania, it is critical to continue to support families experiencing financial hardship and to ensure the children in these families have access to healthy meals.

While we appreciate that USDA has extended a number of waivers through the 2020-2021 school year, Pennsylvania school districts, as well as those across the country, remain in need of additional assistance to support the continuation of dependable and streamlined meal services. To address this need, we urge USDA to immediately utilize the waiver authority provided through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to extend all remaining flexibilities to provide much needed certainty for families and children this year. Specifically we urge you to implement the following nationwide waivers:

- Allow the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) to operate during the 2020-21 school year.
- Expand the non-congregate and other approved waivers for the National School Lunch Program to the SFSP and the SSO.
- Extend the Area Eligibility waiver for SFSP and SSO through the 2020-21 school year.

- Waive the Afterschool Educational or Enrichment Activity Requirement for the Afterschool Meal and Snack Programs available through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) through the 2020-21 school year.
- Authorize SFSP or SSO providers to serve food through the Afterschool Meal and Snack Programs.

We urge USDA to expeditiously approve these school meal flexibilities nationwide for the 2020-2021 school year. As families continue to face this public health and economic crisis, it is essential that we provide much needed certainty for schools and providers to be able to ensure that children can access the healthy food they need. With the countless uncertainties that children are now facing, they should never have to face with the uncertainty of not knowing where or how they will receive their next meal.

Thank you for your consideration and close attention to these priorities that are necessary to address growing child food insecurity in Pennsylvania and across the country during this time.

Sincerely,



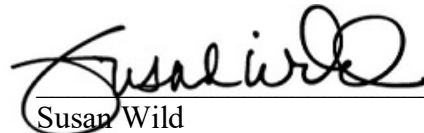
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United States Senator



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Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



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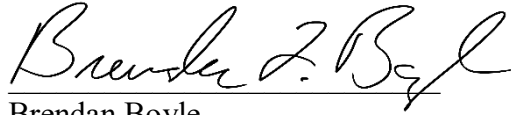
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