



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
HARRISBURG

September 18, 2020

Secretary Sonny Perdue
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Whitten Building, Room 200-A
Washington, DC, 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We, the First Spouses and Partners of Pennsylvania, California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming have long focused our efforts on supporting and advocating for the children and families of our great country. For that reason, we thank you for your recent announcement regarding the extension of much needed waivers to support the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) child nutrition program operations and urge you to work with Congress to further extend and fully fund these programs to guarantee that all children have access to food throughout the entire 2020-21 school year.

Since March, the USDA has issued essential waivers that have allowed our school and community providers the ability to serve meals safely, effectively, and inclusively; and this has provided a level of certainty amidst one of the most uncertain times our nation has faced in modern history. We commend you for the leadership you have shown in ensuring these flexibilities, which have made a substantial difference on the health and well-being of families.

Recent Feeding America research shows that more than 54 million people, including 18 million children, may experience food insecurity this year, marking a 46 percent increase in general food insecurity rates and a 64 percent increase in child food insecurity rates compared to pre-COVID-19 statistics. Kids who are hungry are less likely to learn as much or as fast because a lack of healthy food can impair a child's ability to concentrate and perform well in school. When children are well-fed, it has long-lasting consequences for the entire country – they grow up smarter, healthier, and stronger – and that means a smarter, healthier, stronger nation.

Beyond the health and safety concerns that have come with a global pandemic, we have seen economic hardship abound as millions of people, many of whom are parents and guardians, have lost their jobs or experienced a decrease in employment. This has made our school meals more important than ever. Furthermore, our school staff and volunteers have faced extraordinary administrative burdens and have worked around the clock to meet the needs of their communities.

We recognize that the Department has concerns about the lack of authority to expend funds beyond those that have been Congressionally appropriated, and as such, has only extended the summer feeding waivers through December 31 or as long as funding allows. However, given the myriad of other challenges facing our educational system, our schools, our children, and their families at least deserve the assurance of knowing that these meals will continue to be available throughout this school

year. To that end, we urge you and other members of the Trump Administration to work with Congress to seek immediate resolution to these funding questions.

In addition, we note that the Department has granted waivers as to other requirements pertaining to school meal programs through June 30, 2021. We strongly urge the Department to provide the same consideration – using the authority granted under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act set to sunset as of September 30, 2020 – for the waivers related to allowing:

- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) operations in place of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP);
- Area eligibility in SFSP and SSO;
- Meal pattern flexibility in SFSP and SSO;
- Non-congregate feeding in SFSP and SSO;
- Parent and guardian meal pick-up for children;
- Meal service time restrictions in SFSP and SSO;
- Area eligibility for closed enrolled sites in the SFSP and SSO;
- Waiver of first week site visits for SFSP; and
- Extension of the Offer Versus Serve flexibilities in the SFSP.

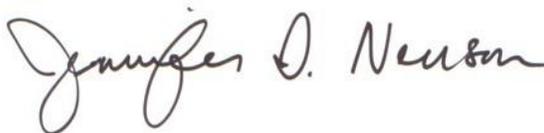
Our children are our greatest resource, and there is no more necessary action than safeguarding their access to life-sustaining meals. The continuation of these waivers will help alleviate confusion for families, eliminate excessive administrative burdens placed on staff, and, ultimately, ensure that all children have enough to eat.

On behalf of the vulnerable children and families of the states we represent, we thank you for your dedication to doing right and feeding everyone, and we humbly ask for your consideration of these requests to ensure that we, as a nation, can continue to execute the mission of the USDA.

Sincerely,



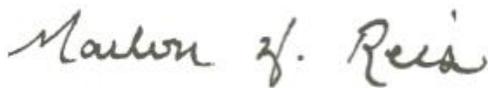
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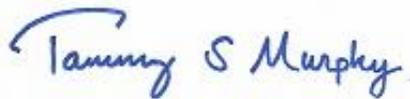
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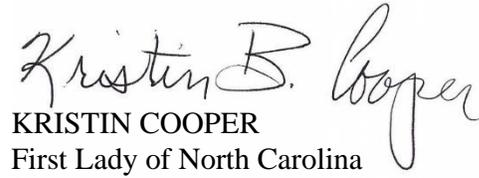


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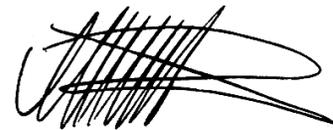
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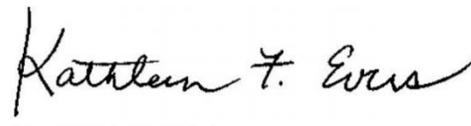

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CC: President Donald and First Lady Melania Trump
Vice President Mike Pence