



August 6, 2020

Via Electronic Mail

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

RE: Support for extension of school food waivers from USDA to help feed California students during COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We are writing to respectfully ask for continued flexibility from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the form of an extension and expansion of specific USDA waivers that will help our school districts continue to feed millions of California students during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. For safety and public health reasons, [5.5 million students in over 90% of California schools](#) are expected to continue distance learning when the school year resumes in the coming weeks. We personally, and on behalf of the many schools and young students in our districts, are asking the USDA and this administration to **extend the following waivers** which create much-needed flexibility and remove barriers to serving meals in a time of unprecedented hunger and economic uncertainty, both in California and across the nation:

1. **Continue providing school meals to all students during the pandemic:** Expand the nationwide non-congregate waiver for school year 2020-21 to include the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and allow these programs to serve all children by extending the Area Eligibility waiver for SFSP and SSO through the school year;
2. **Make it easier for school districts to provide afterschool meals and snacks:** Waive the Afterschool Activity Requirement for the Afterschool Meal and Snack Programs available through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) through the 2020-21 school year. California recognizes the importance of flexibility to provide these meals when congregate activities are unsafe and requested to waive the activity requirement through summer 2020. Reverse the denial of this request;
3. **Three meals a day:** Allow those providing meals through the summer meal programs (SSO and SFSP) to also serve Afterschool Meals and Snacks under CACFP and NSLP, to continue providing the same access to meals as

they have since the pandemic necessitated school closures;

4. **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program:** Extend waivers on the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to allow school districts who participate to continue providing fresh fruits and vegetables to students at any school site.

Proper nutrition is critical to student health, educational development, and academic achievement — whether students are learning at a school site or learning at home.

When the pandemic began, and California schools closed, our school districts pivoted toward utilizing summer meal programs — SFSP and SSO — to provide emergency meal service, in lieu of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). This transition to the summer meal programs, and a number of essential USDA waivers, eliminated the need for income verification, allowed school districts to serve every child under 18, and provided flexible pick-up options at any school site regardless of where a student lives or their household income. Maintaining this critical level of flexibility and accessibility by extending the aforementioned USDA waivers allows school nutrition departments to continue to be a lifeline for millions of hungry students across the nation.

Without the flexibility from USDA, many school districts are being asked to implement new practices when the school year begins: verifying eligibility and collecting payment from some parents as they drive through to pick up meals and forcing some parents to go to multiple school sites to collect meals if their kids attend different school districts. These are unnecessary administrative and logistical burdens that increase the risk of disease transmission and are laid at the feet of struggling families in the middle of a pandemic and economic depression. These restrictions also make it harder for school districts who are already struggling with additional expenses such as hazard pay for frontline staff, personal protective equipment, more expensive pre-packaged items, and new equipment to serve meals outside of cafeterias.

Increased unemployment and economic uncertainty all over the country have made child nutrition programs especially important for many millions of families who are currently struggling.

As you know, the pandemic has introduced new challenges to our already complex and highly regulated school nutrition programs. We in the California legislature recently took action and appropriated \$112 million from the CARES Act to provide an additional 75¢ reimbursement per meal to alleviate budgets strained by COVID-19 response, but that much-needed funding only covers meals through the end of August and is likely to expire sooner. Without new sources of funding and flexibility through waivers that allow federal funds to continue to be efficiently allocated, millions of students could lose access to nutritious meals.

Those who feel similarly about the necessity of extending these waivers have already sent thousands of [letters to lawmakers and the USDA](#) urging the approval of the remaining waivers that have not yet been extended. We add our voices to those calling for actions that protect our children from hunger, improve educational outcomes, and ensure good health.

Thank you for your time and consideration, Mr. Secretary.

Respectfully,



Senator Ben Allen



Assemblymember Marc Berman



Senator Bob Archuleta



Assemblymember Rob Bonta



Senator Patricia Bates



Assemblymember Autumn Burke



Senator Andreas Borgeas



Assemblymember Ed Chau



Senator Brian Dahle



Assemblymember David Chiu



Senator Maria Elena Durazo



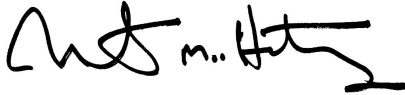
Assemblymember Susan Eggman



Senator Lena Gonzalez



Senator Shannon Grove



Senator Robert M. Hertzberg



Senator Jerry Hill



Senator Ben Hueso



Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson



Senator Mike McGuire



Assemblymember Laura Friedman



Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel



Assemblymember Cristina Garcia



Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia



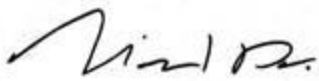
Assemblymember Todd Gloria



Assemblymember Ash Kalra



Assemblymember Marc Levine



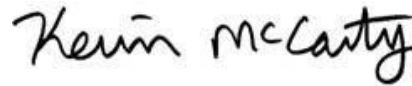
Senator Richard Pan



Assemblymember Monique Limón



Senator Richard Roth



Assemblymember Kevin McCarty



Senator Nancy Skinner



Assemblymember Kevin Mullin



Senator Henry Stern




Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell



Senator Thomas J. Umberg



Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris



Senator Scott Wiener



Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva



Senator Scott Wilk



Assemblymember Eloise Reyes



Assemblymember Robert Rivas



Assemblymember Phil Ting



Assemblymember Blanca E. Rubio



Assemblymember Buffy Wicks



Assemblymember Miguel Santiago

CC:

The Honorable Kamala D. Harris
U.S. Senator for California

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator for California

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California

The Honorable Tony Thurmond
California Superintendent of Public Instruction

Jennifer Siebel Newsom
First Partner of California