

August 19, 2020

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

Ms. Pam Miller
Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
3101 Park Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22302

Dear Mr. Secretary and Ms. Miller,

As community leaders, we believe every one of us has a responsibility to be part of the fight to end childhood hunger. From each of our communities to the national stage, hunger is an issue in this country, but it is also solvable. Part of that solution are the nationwide child nutrition program waiver flexibilities that you have offered to date in response to the coronavirus pandemic. We thank you for your leadership and actions that have helped give children access to the nutrition meals they need at a time of economic crisis and staggering levels of hunger.

We are centered on a mutual dedication to progress in the communities we serve. The nationwide waivers made available through June 30, 2021 were a helpful first step towards offering schools and child nutrition program operators the flexibilities they need for the coming year. However, these waivers are not sufficient to allow schools and sponsors to adapt to the situation unfolding on the ground in order to meet the current level of need. This school year presents a fresh set of challenges, and school and child nutrition program operators desperately need more options to be able to respond to them. We urge you to take immediate action to offer additional flexibilities that will support school and child nutrition program operators in serving meals to children over the coming school year. The level of urgency to make this possible cannot be understated as operators struggle to create staffing plans, place food and equipment orders, and coordinate with key partners and stakeholders.

To give school and child nutrition program operators the tools they need to serve children over the coming year, we ask you to:

- Extend all nationwide waivers for the Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option, including area eligibility waivers.
- Extend the nationwide enrichment activity waiver.
- Give program operators the option to serve meals through the SFSP and SSO throughout the school year.
- Extend the guidance allowing program operators to serve meals through both summer meals and CACFP At-Risk Afterschool.
- Extend waivers and guidance that will permit schools to continue serving produce through the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

The limitations of the school meals programs, particularly around counting and claiming, will not allow for efficient service under the school schedule and meal service models currently planned in many parts of the country. Many schools and districts will begin the school year entirely remotely. Even in schools offering in-person learning full or part-time, many students will continue to learn remotely. Schools operating in person may be serving meals in classrooms to support social distancing. Schools must also be prepared to return to fully remote learning should COVID-19 outbreaks occur. The option of utilizing the summer meals programs will mitigate administrative burdens and avoid overt identification of children eligible for free meals.

Non-profit sponsoring organizations have been essential to feeding kids over the past several months by supplementing the capacity of school nutrition departments, filling the gap when schools had to suspend meal service options, and reaching kids at community sites closer to home. Under the current waivers, non-profit sponsors' options for feeding kids will be extremely limited once the school year begins. Out-of-school-time enrichment providers will likely operate in-person programming at significantly reduced capacity, if at all, over the coming year, which will limit how many children can receive meals through the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals component. At the same time, out-of-school-time providers caring for the children of essential workers will need more robust options for serving meals to children on-site all day.

We ask you to live up to the motto of "doing right and feeding everyone" by providing the urgently needed waiver flexibilities for school and child nutrition program operators. Your continued leadership is critical.

Thank you for your consideration and action on behalf of children across the country.

Sincerely,

Beech-Nut Baby Food

General Mills

Kellogg's

Nestlé USA

Sustainable Food Policy Alliance, including: *Danone North America, Mars Incorporated, Nestlé USA and Unilever United States*