

The Honorable Mark Meadows
Chief of Staff
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Steve Mnuchin
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20220

September 22, 2020

Dear Chief of Staff Meadows and Secretary Mnuchin:

As leaders representing the business, anti-hunger, education, and civil rights communities, **we urge you to prioritize and expand access to federal nutrition assistance programs that directly address the needs of students and families by September 30th, 2020, as part of a continuing resolution (CR) or future COVID-19 relief legislation.**

Our nation faces a hunger crisis. Today, in the United States of America, [more than 50 million people, or 1 in 6 Americans, do not have enough food to eat](#). Food insecurity, both prior to and during the pandemic, disproportionately impacts people of color. Recent Census Bureau data indicates that [nearly 40% of Black and Latino families with children are struggling to put food on the table](#). Earlier this summer, research from the Brookings Institution found that [14 million children](#) needed immediate food assistance. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our nation, these data—representing the daily struggles of families and children across our nation—only grow more devastating.

Earlier this year, Congress took critical steps to address food insecurity. In the “Families First Coronavirus Response Act” ([H.R. 6201](#)), lawmakers increased investments in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and created the [Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer program \(P-EBT\)](#), which allows free- and reduced-price lunch eligible students attending a school closed for five or more consecutive days to receive food purchasing dollars on a debit-like card. Congress also granted the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) authority to waive certain SNAP and meal program requirements, providing students and families greater flexibility as states implemented “stay at home” orders and encouraged social distancing. These actions were pivotal to ensuring that students and families could access meals as unemployment skyrocketed and school buildings rapidly closed. However, as our nation endures another month without a vaccine, a slowly recovering economy, and what is likely to be another wave of infections combined with flu season, it is clear that more is needed.

Additional support from Congress regarding nutrition assistance will be particularly critical as students return to school this fall in all-virtual or hybrid forms of instruction. Prior to the pandemic, nearly 22 million children relied on their school to provide free- or reduced-price lunch each day. Given that many students across the country are learning in settings outside the traditional classroom, it is essential that Congress continue to support the programs that ensure students are fed in the location or in the manner that is most convenient for them and their families. Students cannot learn if they are hungry, and nutrition assistance can go a long way to support academic growth—increasing focus, learning, and retention. We cannot let this hunger crisis create a generational education crisis.

We call on lawmakers to take the following actions to reduce food insecurity and address hunger in America:

Extend, expand, and improve the P-EBT program.

Recent [data indicates](#) that P-EBT benefits “kept between 2.5 [million] and 3.5 million children out of hunger this summer.” However, these benefits only made up for the value of school meals from the time schools closed in March to the end of the academic year. Therefore, lawmakers must:

- Authorize P-EBT benefits for summer 2020 and extend P-EBT through the 2020-21 academic year to allow households with children receiving free- or reduced-price school meals to continue to access food purchasing dollars while their schools operate in a virtual or hybrid model of instruction;
- Ensure that no further legislation is needed to extend the P-EBT program should school building closures and/or hybrid or virtual instruction continue into the academic year;
- Expand P-EBT benefits to cover children under 5 years old; and
- Strengthen the P-EBT program by directing USDA to work more efficiently with states and agencies to administer benefits quickly.

Increase SNAP benefits and prevent harmful cuts to the program.

[Research](#) continues to demonstrate that SNAP is one of the most effective anti-poverty programs in the U.S., [lifting nearly 3.5 million people out of poverty in 2018](#) and helping nearly [40 million people afford food each year](#). Given the impact of COVID-19 on unemployment, many families find themselves newly eligible to receive SNAP benefits and will need this support to ensure that they can afford to eat while also covering reoccurring expenses like rent or mortgage, transportation, internet, and other utilities. As a result, Congress must:

- Increase SNAP maximum monthly allotment by 15%;
- Raise the minimum monthly SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30;
- Suspend administrative actions that eliminate or weaken SNAP benefits or participation; and
- Eliminate work requirements that bar college students from accessing critical SNAP benefits.

Extend child nutrition waivers to maximize access to meals and increase meal program flexibility.

In early September—and after support from a [bipartisan, bicameral group of lawmakers](#) and [over 1,000 state and national advocates](#)—USDA [acted](#) to extend all summer meals program waivers and the option to utilize the summer meals programs through December 31st, 2020. While this extension was critical, Congress, in addition to working with the USDA, must take the following actions:

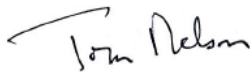
- Extend USDA's waiver authority through 2021;
- Extend all nationwide summer and afterschool meals program waivers through the 2020-21 academic year; and
- Authorize and appropriate the funding necessary to enact the extension of these waivers.

We appreciate your continued commitment to ensuring that students and their families are adequately fed and supported during this challenging time. We urge Congress to act soon to alleviate food insecurity and the current hunger crisis in America. Our nation cannot wait any longer for this critical support.

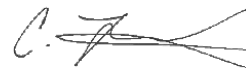
Sincerely,



John B. King Jr.
President and CEO
The Education Trust



Tom Nelson
President and CEO
Share Our Strength



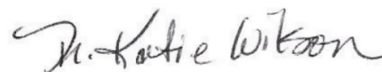
Claire Babineaux-Fontenot
Chief Executive Officer
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National Center for Learning
Disabilities



Max Lesko
National Executive Director
Children's Defense Fund



Katie Wilson, PhD, SNS
Executive Director
Urban School Food Alliance



Luis Guardia
President
Food Research & Action Center



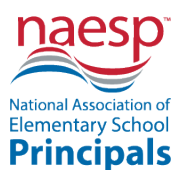
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MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

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To Hunger

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Mike Magee
Chief Executive Officer
Chiefs for Change



Asma Lateef
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Alliance to End Hunger



**Sustainable Food
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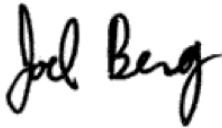
Jean Desravines
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Rebecca S. Pringle
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National Education Association



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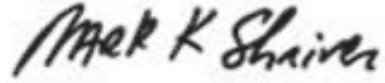
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Save the Children®



Mark K. Shriver
President
Save the Children Action Network



Save the Children
Action Network



Randi Weingarten
President
American Federation of Teachers



CC:

United States Senate

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS)
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)
Senate Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman John Hoeven (R-ND)
Senate Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee Ranking Member Jeff Merkley (D-OR)
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN)
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA)

United States House of Representatives

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D-MN)
House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member K. Michael Conaway (R-TX)
House Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Sanford Bishop Jr. (D-GA)
House Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee Ranking Member Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE)
House Education and Labor Committee Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA)
House Education and Labor Committee Ranking Member Virginia Foxx (R-NC)