

October 8, 2021

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-4502

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby
Vice Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0103

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Chair
House Appropriations Committee
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0703

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1026 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-4312

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-4903

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies 338
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-3406

The Honorable Sanford D. Bishop
Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
2407 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1002

The Honorable Jeffrey Fortenberry
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
1514 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2701

On behalf of our members, including school district and state education leaders, school nutrition professionals, and K-12 education and nutrition advocates, thank you for providing the necessary school meal flexibilities to the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs to ensure our nation's children continue to be fed despite the disruptions caused during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your work has been critical in allowing school food service operators to continue participating in the federal child nutrition programs and provide snacks and meals to the students who need them.

We are grateful to see the inclusion of school meal program flexibilities in the FY22 Agriculture and Rural Development Appropriations Bill pertaining to fruit and vegetable variety, sodium, milk, and whole grain requirements. We are also appreciative of the language included in the continuing resolution (CR) bill to extend USDA's waiver authority for nutrition programs until June 30, 2022. These flexibilities are essential as school districts continue to deal with the economic impacts of the pandemic, including supply chain disruptions, labor shortages, and rising food insecurity in local communities.

Districts across the country are facing various supply chain challenges in purchasing and receiving food through their regular procurement channels. Specifically, some districts and schools are experiencing unanticipated cancellation of food and supply contracts, lack of availability of certain foods, unexpected substitution of food products, increased shipping and

food storage costs, and increased food and supply prices due to COVID-19 supply chain disruptions.

We have heard from our members reports of food delivery trucks not showing up at all or being severely delayed, trucks showing up only half-full with incomplete orders, and delivering products that were not ordered. This has made it very difficult to plan meal menus during the school year. Regarding supply costs, districts are reporting up to 30% price increases for raw materials such as aluminum, paper, and plastic materials, which affect costs for foil sheets, lids, napkins, placemats, wipes, towels, food packaging, cutlery, and other common supplies for school food service operations. Moreover, this is occurring at a time when districts are struggling to hire and retain sufficient staff to administer meal programs, ensure program compliance, and feed students because of broader labor, market, and public health conditions outside of their control. As such, any flexibilities granted by Congress and USDA for meeting meal-pattern requirements, bidding and procurement rules, onsite monitoring, and nutrition reporting requirements are much appreciated throughout the pandemic.

We are working with the Biden-Harris Administration to ensure they understand the extraordinary impact of the supply chain disruptions on schools and offer ourselves as a resource for your offices as well. We are hopeful that efficient and effective solutions can be implemented soon, but in the meantime would like to thank you and urge Congress to maintain these school meal flexibilities so that districts can continue providing meals for students and customize service delivery to accommodate local needs and realities.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about how to support our nation's schools with feeding students during the COVID-19 emergency, please contact Elleka Yost, ASBO International Director of Advocacy, and Tara Thomas, AASA Policy Analyst, at eyost@asbointl.org and tthomas@aasa.org.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of School Administrators
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of Chief State School Officers
Council of the Great City Schools
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
Organizations Concerned about Rural Education
School Nutrition Association
Share Our Strength
Urban School Food Alliance