

March 25, 2020

The Honorable Pamilyn Miller
Administrator, Food and Nutrition Services
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Administrator Miller:

We appreciate the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service's (USDA FNS) quick release of the three nationwide waivers after the passage of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. We ask that you issue additional nationwide waivers to ensure access to meals during this national emergency and to ease the administrative burden on State child nutrition agencies as well as Food and Nutrition Services staff. Specifically, we ask that you:

- **Waive the Area Eligibility Requirement.** This is the number one request that we are hearing from schools and community-based organizations. States have submitted this waiver request, but their requests have not yet been approved, and it was not included in the three nationwide waivers issued on Friday. It is an administrative challenge for schools and sponsors to identify children who have been certified for free or reduced-price school meals. This is particularly true in rural areas that do not have the same concentration of poverty as other areas. In addition, with each passing day, more children are becoming eligible for free school meals. With schools closed there is no mechanism for a newly eligible family to be certified to receive free school meals.
- **Waive the eligibility requirements for school meals and allow all meals to be reimbursed at the free rate.** Now that USDA has issued a nationwide non-congregate waiver that applies to the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs, closed schools will be providing meals through these programs instead of switching to summer. It is critical for USDA to waive the eligibility requirements so that families in need who are presenting at sites for food or requesting meal delivery are able to receive meals through the child nutrition programs.
- **Issue nationwide waivers for the waiver requests that USDA has already received from states.** The first three nationwide waivers issued on Friday were incredibly helpful, but a number of states have requested additional waivers in order to adequately respond to the need. States, schools, and community stakeholders have been on the frontline responding to the crisis. They have the best understanding of the challenges and barriers being faced. The waivers that states have submitted are critical to easing administrative barriers and allowing meals to be served. These should be made available

nationwide to allow an easier administrative process while allowing for continued oversight.

- **Waive the requirement that children be present in order for parents to pick up meals. States are implementing this requirement inconsistently.** Some states, acknowledging the unprecedented situation we are in that requires contact to be limited are not requiring children (or all children in the family) to be present when receiving meals to take home. The alternative puts lives at risk. Since schools, summer food sponsors, and program operators are putting their staff's health on the line in order to distribute meals to families, we need to allow them to provide meals in the safest way possible. It is critical to both the health of the staff at the sites and the well-being of the families that need meals to allow adults to pick up or receive meals whether or not one or more of their children are present.
- **Push back the Community Eligibility Deadlines.** The April 1st deadline for community eligibility is just one week away, and the May 1st deadline will be here before we know it. Schools are likely to remain closed for many more weeks, and school nutrition and state agency staff are focusing on ensuring access to meals during school closures. Even when schools reopen, schools will need additional time beyond the June 30 deadline to determine whether or not community eligibility is the right choice for the 2020-2021 school year . We ask that you push back these three deadlines indefinitely to give states and schools the flexibility they need to in order to manage the process of schools adopting community eligibility for the 2020-2021 school year.
- **In coordination with CDC and other federal agencies issue specific guidance for school nutrition professionals, summer food sponsors, and volunteers' safety during school closure meal service.** Many school nutrition professionals, program operators, and volunteers have stepped up to make sure children have access to food during school closures. This is an unprecedented situation and these individuals are not trained health care providers. It is imperative to provide specific guidance so that they stay safe while meeting their communities' food needs.

We appreciate your consideration and encourage you to move swiftly on issuing these waivers so that communities are able to better respond to the current crisis.

Signed:

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Advocates for Better Children's Diets
Afterschool Alliance
Alliance to End Hunger
American Commodity Distribution Association
American Diabetes Association

American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers
American Heart Association
American Public Health Association
Association of Education Service Agencies (AESAs)
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
A Place at the Table
Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Bread for the World
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Center for Wellness and Nutrition
Child Care Aware® of America
Children's Defense Fund
Coalition on Human Needs
Congressional Hunger Center
Early Care & Learning Council
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Feeding America
First Focus on Children
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
FoodCorps
Healthy Schools Campaign
Hunger Free America
Hunger Free Colorado
Islamic Relief USA
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, Program in Nutrition, Teachers College,
Columbia University
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Meals on Wheels America
MomsRising
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Education Association
National PTA
National Recreation and Park Association
National Rural Education Association
National WIC Association
National Women's Law Center
North Carolina Alliance for Health
Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
RESULTS
School Nutrition Association
School Social Work Association of America
Share Our Strength

Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
Trust for America's Health
UnidosUS
Union of Concerned Scientists
Urban School Food Alliance
YMCA of the USA