

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