

May XX, 2020

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We appreciate USDA Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) efforts to ensure children have access to nutritious food during the COVID-19 pandemic through the issuance of nationwide and state waivers. As more families feel the economic impact of the crisis, we urge you to continue to these waivers to respond to the growing need throughout the summer, including extending states' **area eligibility waivers** to ease the burden on local schools and school districts, as well as state child nutrition agencies and FNS staff.

Specifically, we ask that you **extend Washington's area eligibility waiver for child nutrition programs through September**. A majority of states, including Washington, have received an area eligibility waiver, yet it is an administrative and logistical challenge for schools to identify children who have been certified for free or reduced-price school meals. This is a challenge for rural, suburban and urban districts alike. With each passing day, more children are becoming eligible for free school meals, yet with schools closed there are significant barriers for newly eligible families to be certified to receive free school meals.

Even more concerning is that when our school year ends, many schools that have successfully been feeding kids in need right now will no longer qualify to continue to serving these children because of area eligibility restrictions. Yet food security continues to be a top concern for families from a wide variety of backgrounds and circumstances who now face extreme uncertainty and financial distress, many of whom never had to worry about how to feed their children until now.

Our schools are trusted, well-connected institutions in communities across our state; families and community-based organizations have been able to turn to us for much-needed support since COVID-19 first appeared, and we need to be able to continue to respond to our children's nutrition needs throughout this summer.

As education leaders and legislators, we appreciate your consideration and encourage you to move quickly to extend Washington's current waiver and ensure our schools and communities have all the tools and security we need to respond to children and their families in the current crisis.

Sincerely,