

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 12, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

In response to the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, public school systems across the country are planning for the possibility that they will need to close schools. In several school districts, schools have already closed. These ongoing and potential closures could mean that students who rely on school meals go hungry unless plans are in place to avoid interruptions to meal services.

We write to urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) proactively to inform all state agencies of the availability of waivers to provide flexibilities for Child Nutrition Programs during this public health emergency. We also urge the department to ensure that the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the National School Lunch Program's (NLSP) Seamless Summer Option (SSO), and the At-Risk Afterschool Meals component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) accounts have adequate funds under current budget authority, and to inform Congress if an increased appropriation is required.

School closures due to health and safety reasons should not interrupt meal services on which so many students rely. We applaud USDA's quick approval of waivers for Washington, California, Alaska, and a number of other states, which will help public schools in those states continue to provide meals to students throughout school closures. We also applaud your stated willingness to provide waivers quickly if requested.

However, USDA should also proactively provide all state agencies across the country with information on seeking a waiver and assistance in submitting their waiver specific to this particular public health emergency to help states plan ahead as they develop responses to this pandemic. Guidance from the department will allow states to craft waiver applications that address their particular schools' needs and give them the flexibility to respond as this public health crisis develops. Based on the number of school closures and the waivers states may seek, the department should also ensure that all programs have adequate funding during this public health emergency under current budget authority. And if not, Congress should be notified immediately.

No child should go hungry because their school has closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We are encouraged by the steps USDA is already taking, and we ask that you provide a written response by March 17, 2020, to update us on additional steps USDA is taking to help ensure uninterrupted meal services for students.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



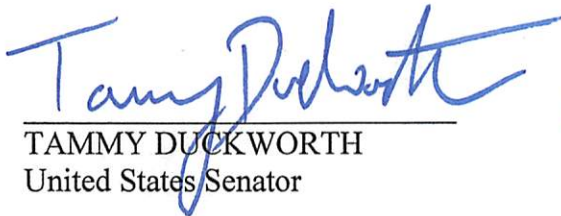
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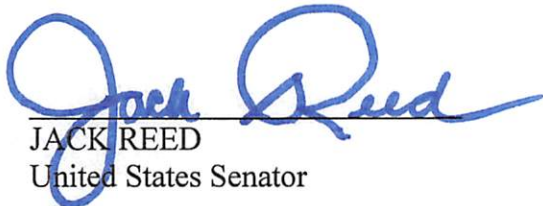
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