**Summer Meal Waiver Extension – Sample Organization Letter to USDA**

**Background:** When school's out and summer begins, school districts and community-based organizations typically operate close to 5,000 summer meal sites and serve meals to over 600,000 kids. This year will not be typical. Financial strains, staffing challenges, and summer-learning closures related to COVID-19 may lead many sites to limit or close down their summer-meal operations if appropriate flexibilities from USDA are not in place. Federal action is needed to help mitigate the harm.

Meal service through school and community sites plays an important role in preventing summer hunger. USDA recently extended critical child nutrition waivers that are necessary for meal programs to operate this summer during COVID-19, including: Non-Congregate Feeding, Parent/Guardian Meal Pick Up, Meal Times, and Area Eligibility. Unfortunately, the waiver extensions only go through August 31st and some schools are not scheduled to come back from break until September. Other waivers, including the After School Activity and Unanticipated School Closures waiver are set to expire even earlier, at the end of June. The expiration of these waivers will lead to a smaller number of children having access to free meals and we anticipate that many sites will choose to close down because of the administrative challenges involved in transitioning to summer meal service.

**How your organization can help:** We encourage summer meal program operators and education groups (schools, county offices of education, etc.) to use this sample letter to ask USDA to extend federal nutrition waivers through the summer and next school year. In your letter, please document the harm to your community that would result from these waivers not being extended. After you submit your letter to USDA, consider sharing it with your members of congress.

**Email your letter** **to:** agsec@usda.gov **CC:** Brandon.Lipps@usda.gov; Pam.miller@fns.usda.gov; Jessica.Shahin@fns.usda.gov; kristen.hyatt@usda.gov; Angela.kline@usda.gov; Jesus.Mendoza@fns.usda.gov.

**For questions about this letter? Visit** [**www.cfpa.net/covid-19summerupdate**](http://www.cfpa.net/covid-19summerupdate) **or contact:**

* Andrew Cheyne at 510.350.9915 or andrew@cafoodbanks.org
* Jessica Bartholow at 916.282.5119 or jbartholow@wclp.org
* Melissa Cannon at 209.200.8446 or melissa@cfpa.net

**[Insert letterhead or mailing address]**

**[Date]**

The Honorable Sonny Perdue

Secretary of Agriculture

U.S. Department of Agriculture

1400 Independence Ave. SW

Washington, DC 20250

**Re:  Extending Child Nutrition Program Flexibilities**

**Supporting Legislation Making Critical Child Anti-Hunger Investments**

Dear Secretary Purdue:

[INTRO PARAGRAPH ABOUT THE SUBMITTER]

         We are writing to implore your urgent response to prevent child hunger. The COVID-19 crisis stands to increase food insecurity throughout the nation, making it harder for families to access the food they need. A recent nationally representative survey found that, “two in five households with mothers with children 12 and under were food insecure. In almost one in five households of mothers with children age 12 and under, the children were experiencing food insecurity.”[[1]](#footnote-1) As we head into summer, and families continue to feel the economic effects of the crisis, we can expect that, without additional action from USDA and the President, past inequities in food access will persist with low-income families with children being at greater risk for food insecurity.

The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Nutrition Programs are critical to the health of California’s youth, preventing hunger and providing nutrition. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and meals provided through child nutrition programs are especially important for students whose families are economically disadvantaged. [In California, nearly 60% of all students are eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals.](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filessp.asp) For some of these students, these programs may provide the only meals that they eat each day.

         We appreciate the USDA’s approval of California’s Pandemic EBT plan and your extension of several critical flexibilities such as the [May 15th Nationwide extension of the Non-Congregate, Parent Pick Up and Meal Time waivers through August 31, 2020](https://www.fns.usda.gov/news-item/usda-026220) and the June 10th extension of the Area Eligibility waiver through August 31, 2020. The availability of meals through these programs has become even more crucial as millions of Californians have found themselves suddenly unemployed amid the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. The work by the California Department of Education (CDE), school districts, food service employees, community partners and other stakeholders in converting school and summer meal programs to grab-and-go models has been a bright spot in the effort to prevent hunger during these unprecedented times.

 These recent actions were necessary but not sufficient, however, to prevent a summer hunger crisis and to protect public health. [Currently only 17% of children eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals receive Summer meals,](https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/frac-summer-nutrition-report-2019.pdf) and even fewer children will have access to food this summer, without the ability for programs to operate under all current flexibilities until September 30, 2020. Here are just a few of the remaining issues:

* Many summer programs and summer schools have been cut or canceled. Those that are allowed to remain open will need to do so in a way that places limitations on the number of children they can serve. Ensuring providers can distribute meals without programming is therefore critical under the current conditions.
* The rapidly [deteriorating economic conditions](https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cps_charts.pdf), [disproportionately experienced by communities of color](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/05/financial-and-health-impacts-of-covid-19-vary-widely-by-race-and-ethnicity/), underscore how many children are newly hungry but whose entitlement to aid will not be captured in area eligibility determinations for summer 2020.
* Even in a normal year, many school districts do not return until after August 31. Due to the pandemic, many are now planning for fall school year returns that are delayed, staggered, or make other modifications that require flexibility through next school year.

         **We therefore request that the USDA extend all state and nationwide waivers issued to date, including but not limited to After School Activity, Area Eligibility, Meal Times, Non-Congregate Feeding, Parent/Guardian Meal Pick Up, and Unanticipated School Closures through June 2021. This will reduce administrative burden on USDA and state agencies from individual approvals.** We are aware that the California Department of Education has made similar requests to extend waivers, which we urge USDA to approve and continue the current flexibilities vital to safely feed our children.

In addition to this request, we hope you will encourage the President to support proposals to increase anti-hunger benefits to the  [1.9 million children](https://public.tableau.com/profile/california.department.of.social.services#!/vizhome/CFdashboard-PUBLIC/Home?publish=yes) whose families rely on SNAP to prevent hunger. The Senate is considering H.R. 6800, legislation that [passed with bi-partisan votes in the House of Representatives](http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2020/roll109.xml). It would make significant investments in SNAP [proven to make life-changing improvements in children’s lives](https://www.nber.org/papers/w18535.pdf). It would also extend the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program through the summer to ensure families have enough resources to buy food and [provide much-needed economic stimulus](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/93529/err-265.pdf?v=8010.7). **We urge your immediate support for the Senate to pass and President to sign H.R. 6800 into law.**

No child in our great nation should go hungry. Thank you for your work to prevent hunger, especially among children, during this Public Health Emergency and beyond. We look forward to your favorable consideration of these requests at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

CC: Brandon Lipps, Undersecretary, Food Nutrition and Consumer Services

 Pam Miller, Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service

 Kristen Hyatt, Assistant Deputy Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service

Jessica Shaheen, Associate Administrator, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Angela Kline, Director, Policy and Program Development Division, Child Nutrition

Jesus Mendoza, Regional Administrator, Western Regional Office

1. Bauer, Lauren. The Hamilton Project. May 6, 2020. <https://www.hamiltonproject.org/blog/the_covid_19_crisis_has_already_left_too_many_children_hungry_in_america> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)