



March 9, 2020

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

Dear Mr. Secretary,

As the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prepares and considers guidance on pandemic-related school dismissals and closures, we would like to share with you recommendations to ensure that the nutritional needs of low-income children and families are met during unanticipated school closure or community quarantine declarations.

Share Our Strength is an organization committed to ending hunger and poverty in the United States and abroad. Through our No Kid Hungry Campaign, we help end hunger and food insecurity in America by connecting children and families to the federal nutrition programs for which they are eligible.

Today, almost 22 million low-income children from rural, urban and suburban communities rely on school meals as a consistent source of their daily nutrition needs during the school year. Without clear and consistent guidance and authority from the USDA, school closures will increase childhood hunger due to the lack of access to school meals.

Serving meals to children while also adhering to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance to prevent community spread of COVID-19 presents unique challenges. Therefore, we offer the following recommendations be included USDA's guidance on Pandemic School Dismissals and Closures:

- *Waive the congregate feeding requirement in areas experiencing school closures and dismissals due to COVID-19, giving school food authorities and community organizations the authority to serve reimbursable meals and snacks to children through the SFSP, SSO, or CACFP At-Risk Afterschool component with meal pick-up, meal delivery, and other service options.*
- *Waive certain operational and programmatic requirements, as appropriate, such as eligibility requirements and meal pattern or meal component requirements. Children at schools that are not ordinarily eligible to operate the SFSP or CACFP At-Risk Afterschool component would benefit greatly from this support as parents lose the ability to work during school closures or community quarantines.*
- *Guarantee reimbursement of all meals and snacks served to children through the SFSP, SSO, or CACFP At-Risk Afterschool component during school closures and dismissals due to COVID-19.*

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- *Direct all state agencies to encourage school food authorities and community organizations to make plans, update their agreements, and submit waiver requests in advance, where possible, in order to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of affected and at-risk communities.*

We urge the USDA to issue this guidance in an expedient manner. School food authorities and community organizations will better help children and families with timely guidance and reassurance that meals served to children in affected areas will be reimbursed.

We believe that children should not suffer any direct or indirect health impacts due to hunger and food insecurity as a result of this public health response. Therefore, we urge you to implement guidance that prioritizes the overall health and wellbeing of children, to ensure that they can continue to thrive and be healthy.

Share Our Strength stands ready to be a collaborative partner with the USDA and all of the interested stakeholders in meeting the needs of vulnerable children during this public health response. We welcome the opportunity to answer any questions about these recommendations and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Tom Nelson
President & CEO
Share Our Strength

cc: Mr. Brandon Lipps, Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition,
and Consumer Services