

July 6, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader
The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McCarthy:

In normal times, our schools feed nearly 30 million children every day with federally subsidized lunches and breakfasts. These are children whose families are struggling to make ends meet in red and blue states.

In both California and Kentucky, nearly six in 10 students are eligible for these meals; in New York, just under half the students qualify for the same assistance to fight hunger.

We are urging you to rapidly pass legislation to address the nation's hunger crisis—as a stand-alone bill or part of broad COVID-19 relief such as the HEROES Act—by extending and expanding the emergency provisions that enable current food distribution by school districts during the summer months and into the fall, as needed.

We need to create a nationwide meal assistance program this summer that utilizes public schools as community kitchens and creates safe, accessible options for students and their families who continue to face food insecurity.

To continue to provide access to nutritional meals to students and their families, we estimate that an additional \$900 million will be needed, as well as the continuation of necessary USDA waivers. This will allow the meals program to capture lost reimbursements and cover higher pandemic-related costs as well as expand access to meals to families this summer.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed children at even greater risk of food insecurity. Food insecurity for families with children has tripled, and nearly four in 10 parents nationwide are cutting the size of meals or skipping meals for their children because they do not have enough money to buy food.

Meanwhile, demand at food banks, soup kitchens and food pantries have skyrocketed nationwide, and these organizations do not have enough resources to keep up. States and counties across the nation are facing large backlogs in processing new applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

This is a national humanitarian crisis that requires immediate action and innovation across several fronts.

We urge you to support the nutrition and hunger provisions in the HEROES Act passed by the House of Representatives, increasing SNAP benefits by at least 15 percent and extending the Pandemic-EBT for all states and territories into the summer and through the upcoming school year.

But we also need to transform our community-based solutions this summer, particularly the role of public schools in responding to this emergency.

As record unemployment continues, Congressional support is needed to mitigate the nation's hunger and nutrition crisis by extending and expanding the successful school meals program during the pandemic to enable public schools to better serve as community meal hubs helping families and children to weather this storm.

Today it's a pandemic, but tomorrow it might be a hurricane or historic flooding. Our public schools stand at the heart of communities across the nation. Our school food service workers and school kitchens are on the frontlines of disaster response and economic recovery.

As we saw in the beginning of this pandemic, our public school kitchens and school staff feed communities in their hour of greatest need. With the support of our public school bus drivers, they can also distribute that food to neighborhoods far and wide. With the right partners and funding, our schools have the ability to not only continue to feed children throughout the summer but also to expand our reach to feed families.

By expanding and extending the school meal program during the summer and into the fall as needed, we can also support the wider food economy—from the farmers who are destroying crops and produce because of the collapse of demand from restaurants and hotels, to the food wholesalers whose drivers are struggling without work.

As advocates of public education, health and social services and ending hunger, poverty and undernutrition we are joining together to ask that you extend and expand the school meal program this summer in line with these principles:

- Provide funding and flexibilities to make meals available during the summer, not just to eligible students in states and territories but also to their families;
- Fully fund the program's extension meet the real costs, which are higher than normal because of pandemic-related disruptions;
- Activate school bus networks to improve meal distribution; and
- Adequately fund and direct the Federal Emergency Management Agency's mass feeding response to this pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, public schools have successfully met higher participation demands without any additional reimbursement from the federal government, along with the loss of regular sales revenue. What we need now are resources and a strategic approach to feeding vulnerable families, with public school kitchens at the heart of the solution.

We are not reinventing the wheel. Local governments, school districts and nonprofits have been working together for decades to ensure our children and families have access to meals when school is out.

Our country has been running nutrition programs during the school year and the summer without sufficient funding. Now it is time to invest.

We hope you will support additional funding to expand access to nutritional meals to students and families who face food insecurity and to activate our public schools as community kitchens.

While so much of the COVID-19 crisis remains uncertain, this is a problem we can solve.

Respectfully,

World Central Kitchen and José Andrés
American Federation of Teachers
African American Ministers In Action
Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools
Arne Duncan
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA)
Center for American Progress
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Coalition of Black Trade Unionist (CBTU)
Dialogue on Diversity
Emerson Collective and Laurene Powell Jobs
Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials (GALEO)
Hispanic Heritage Foundation (HHF)
Hispanic Federation
Hunger Free America
Justice for Migrant Women
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA)
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Mana, A National Latina Organization
MomsRising
National A. Philip Randolph Institute
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
National Council of Negro Women, Inc. (NCNW)
National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON)
National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA)
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL)
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
National Migrant Seasonal Head Start Association (NMSHSA)
Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference
Share Our Strength
Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
UndocuBlack Network
United States Hispanic Leadership Institute (USHLI)
United We Dream Action
Urban School Food Alliance

CC: Chairman Pat Roberts; Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow (Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry)
Chairman Bobby Scott; Ranking Member Virginia Foxx (House Committee on Education and Labor)
Chairman Collin Peterson; Ranking Member Michael Conaway (House Committee on Agriculture)