



March 13, 2020

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

Dear Mr. Secretary,

The spread and response to the SARS-CoV-2 virus and subsequent COVID-19 disease is disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations – not only in respects to health, but also individuals and families dealing with poverty and food insecurity. The Alliance to End Hunger has been made aware of specific fears, concerns and anxieties through our advisory council of individuals with lived experience with poverty and hunger. These concerns include an inability to prepare for possible long-term quarantine/isolation on limited and inadequate budgets. Additionally, retailers in high-poverty areas are witnessing a depletion of much-needed supplies for long-term planning. Many vulnerable individuals do not have the ability to travel further than their local stores to gather what they need. Unfortunately, this situation is made more dire for individuals who are already living paycheck-to-paycheck. Any requests to stay home from work for an extended period would prove devastating to many families.

We know that you share our concern for these vulnerable individuals and families. In order to provide immediate relief to poor and hungry people in the United States during this uncertain time, there are key recommendations provided by members of our coalition which we urge you to consider as you forge an effective and valuable strategy that is sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable people in this country:

- Promote flexibility throughout emergency food programs. Feeding America suggests a blanket national waiver to expand income eligibility for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) so that food banks and states can utilize these programs as resources for impacted community members.
- Benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) should be expanded to increase immediate purchasing power of beneficiaries seeking to plan ahead for COVID-19 response measures. Further, pending administrative rules decreasing the number of eligible SNAP recipients – specifically the recent rule concerning Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents – should be put on hold during the current public health crisis. Feeding America suggests that USDA consider providing broad flexibilities, and also consider supplemental benefits to SNAP recipients as needed to ensure individuals and families have the food resources they need. Beneficiaries who are asked to plan for extended time periods would benefit greatly from a temporary increase in assistance.
- Local and community health concerns are leading to school closings and dismissals. While these decisions are prudent, many children rely on school-provided breakfasts and lunches to stabilize the threat of food insecurity. Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry suggests waiving 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. It is also suggested that eligibility rules for children be loosened temporarily, and reimbursement to authorized entities providing meals and snacks during school closures and dismissals be guaranteed. We were encouraged to see the USDA Secretary commit to many of these recommendations during a hearing in the House of Representatives. We urge you to follow up to ensure changes are being made immediately.

- Both Feeding America and Share Our Strength strongly suggest that advance planning concerning food distribution within communities prior to imminent school closures be encouraged. This should include allowances for bulk food distribution and distribution through alternative sites as options to minimize contact between individuals.
- COVID-19 has proven to be exceptionally virulent among older populations, and will disproportionately impact older Americans facing food insecurity. Meals on Wheels America urges access to supplemental funding and emergency guidance for Older Americans Act (OAA) programs and support. This includes additional emergency funding for senior nutrition programs to replenish and expand the supply of shelf-stable meals, frozen meals and/or other nutrition services that are being or have already been provided in communities.
- Meals on Wheels America also strongly suggests that federal funding be provided for activities related to the lessening of contact risk posed by COVID-19. This includes options to deliver meals to seniors who usually receive meals in group settings, such as senior centers and community dining sites. Funding should also be provided for additional training of volunteers who deliver meals regularly to vulnerable older Americans.

Fortunately, the U.S. House of Representatives has introduced the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. This bill would offer much-needed relief to families who currently are – or soon will be – struggling to make ends meet as the COVID-19 response broadens and becomes more restrictive. Many of the recommendations above are included in the bill, and we urge you to support and encourage its passage for the sake of millions of anxious and fearful Americans.

The Alliance to End Hunger understands the complexity of the situation, as well as the evolving nature of the crisis, but the fears and anxieties of people living with food insecurity and poverty cannot wait any longer. As you continue to lead efforts to combat this public health emergency, and consult with necessary agencies and individuals, we urge you to consider the recommendations above, and use our network of experts and front-line service providers to assist you in planning and implementation of strategies.

Best Regards,



Rebecca Middleton  
Executive Director  
Alliance to End Hunger  
[rmiddleton@alliancetoendhunger.org](mailto:rmiddleton@alliancetoendhunger.org)