

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 12, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write on behalf of all students in New Jersey who depend on free and reduced school meal programs to ensure they receive meals throughout school closures related to the ongoing novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. On March 9, Governor Phil Murphy declared a State of Emergency and a Public Health Emergency in New Jersey over the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak in the state.¹ In an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and safeguard the health of students, teachers, and staff, several school districts have already announced temporary closures.² We anticipate the number of school closures to increase. During this trying time for our constituents, it is important all is done to ensure no student goes hungry.

We applaud United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for waiving program requirements, including waiving the group setting meal requirement, to ensure states have the needed flexibility to safely administer school meal programs during COVID-19 closures.³ We encourage the USDA to give full and fair consideration to the State of New Jersey's request and use its authority to allow all eligible School Food Authorities (SFAs) to serve students meals through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), which 41 of the 675 school districts in New Jersey are eligible to participate in, during unanticipated school closures across our state. Specifically, we request the following of USDA:

- Waive the group setting meal requirement to allow New Jersey to provide grab-and-go service to students at a central site, which is a necessary public health precaution.
- Extend the program eligibility to participate in SFSP to all SFAs impacted by COVID-19 closures to provide meals to low-income students.

During a public health emergency, the last thing students need to worry about is where they are going to get their next meal. We look forward to working with you to meet New Jersey's needs by providing the flexibility permitted by statute throughout the COVID-19 epidemic. Thank you in advance for your attention to this pressing matter.

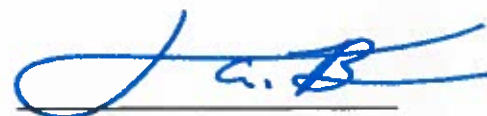
Sincerely,



Bill Pascrell Jr.
Member of Congress



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

1 <https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/562020/20200309b.shtml>

2 <https://www.nj.com/coronavirus/2020/03/nj-coronavirus-update-here-are-the-schools-that-are-closing-altering-schedules.html>

3 <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/03/10/secretary-perdue-announces-proactive-flexibilities-feed-children>