

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 21, 2020

Lourdes R. Padilla
Secretary
Maryland Department of Human Services
311 West Saratoga Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Cailey Locklair
President
Maryland Retailers Association
171 Conduit Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Secretary Padilla and Ms. Locklair,

We write today to ask that you to work to ensure that Maryland Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients have access to grocery delivery and pick-up services in light of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency. We believe that the Department of Human Services (DHS) should work to expedite statewide implementation of the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot. Additionally, we urge DHS and the Maryland Retailers Association to work together to utilize existing flexibilities to allow SNAP recipients to place grocery orders online or over the phone for delivery or pick-up while using their benefits. These flexibilities should remain in place at least until the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot is available statewide.

As you know, COVID-19 cases in Maryland are rising rapidly and the virus is hitting many of our communities hard. To date, more than 14,000 Marylanders have tested positive for COVID-19, more than 3,000 have been hospitalized, and nearly 600 have died. In order to minimize potential exposure to COVID-19, many Maryland residents have been using grocery delivery and pick-up services. However, these services are out-of-reach for Marylanders using SNAP benefits to purchase their groceries.

We are pleased that Maryland was selected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to participate in the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot, which allows online grocery purchases using SNAP benefits. However, as you are aware, this pilot program is not yet operational in Maryland. We believe providing SNAP recipients with the ability to make online purchases has significant value at all times, but it is now critical in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. We strongly urge DHS to work to make the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot available statewide as expeditiously as possible.

We believe that operationalizing the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot must be a top priority for DHS; however, all possible avenues to making these important services available to SNAP recipients as quickly as possible must be pursued. The USDA provides existing flexibilities that allows for grocery delivery and curbside pick-up for SNAP recipients as long as the recipient's benefits are processed at the point of sale. However, these flexibilities are not being used in Maryland. We strongly urge DHS and the Maryland Retailers Association to work together to implement these flexibilities and ensure they remain in place at least until the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot is operating statewide.

Additionally, while curbside grocery pick-up will help limit exposure to COVID-19, broad access to grocery delivery services should be the main priority as curbside pick-up still poses challenges for some Maryland residents. For example, nearly one-third of Baltimore residents do not own a car, which means that in the absence of grocery delivery services, they are relying on public transportation or transportation from other people to meet their basic food needs. It is important to take these challenges into consideration as you develop and implement these policies.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you to ensure accessibility of grocery delivery and curbside pick-up for SNAP recipients.

Sincerely,

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
U.S. Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin

Benjamin L. Cardin
U.S. Senator

/s/ Steny H. Hoyer

Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress

/s/ C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger

C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

/s/ John P. Sarbanes

John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

/s/ Anthony G. Brown

Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

/s/ Jamie Raskin

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/ David Trone

David Trone
Member of Congress