

United States Senate

February 25, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Leahy and Vice Chair Shelby,

As you finalize the Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations Act, I write in support of extending the authority granted to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture by Congress to issue nationwide waivers with regard to school and child nutrition programs.

First granted under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020, and extended by the Continuing Appropriations Act of 2021 and Other Extensions Act and the Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act of 2021, this authority has enabled the USDA to ensure schools and summer programs could maximize access to meals while minimizing potential COVID-19 exposure. Through such actions, schools have been permitted flexibilities so that parents could pick up meals for students during school closures, meals could be taken and consumed off site, schools could adapt to supply chain issues, previously ineligible students could have access to free meals, and school meals could be reimbursed at higher rates. These waivers have been critical for schools adapting to the shifting COVID-19 pandemic and have helped alleviate hunger for millions of children and their families.

The current waiver authority expires June 30, 2022. I strongly urge the inclusion of an extension of the authority to grant waivers for school and summer meal programs through at least September 30, 2022, in the final Appropriations Act. This will permit meal programs this summer and in the 2022-2023 school year to meet the needs of their students as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 public health emergency and during our nation's recovery.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and I look forward to continuing to work with you on ensuring food security for our nation's students and their families.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator