

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

June 17, 2022

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, S-221
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate Minority Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, S-230
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, H-222
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, H-204
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, and Leader McCarthy,

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the child nutrition programs, and the role they play in keeping hunger at bay for millions of children across the country. As schools closed across the country, families faced the same challenges they face every summer when they lose access to free school meals: increased food insecurity, weight gain, and learning disruptions.

As Congress develops legislation to support families being impacted by high food costs and provide pandemic relief, we ask that it include the following three things in any upcoming packages to help ensure that the child nutrition programs are able to support recovery from the impact of the pandemic. School children have to have access to the nutrition they need to grow and thrive while they are at school and during the summer. These provisions will also set the stage for a much stronger Child Nutrition Reauthorization that can take additional steps to ensure that the child nutrition programs are able to fully meet children's nutritional needs while they are at school, afterschool and summer programs, and in childcare.

- **Extend the Child Nutrition Waivers.** The waiver authority that we provided the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 has allowed school nutrition programs, local government agencies, and nonprofit organizations to keep feeding children in the face of the numerous challenges the pandemic created by providing the necessary program flexibility. In addition, the waivers have been a critical support to school nutrition programs. According to a USDA survey of school nutrition programs during School Year 2021-2022 school year, 90 percent used the Seamless Summer Option, 92 percent reported supply chain challenges, and nearly one in four school nutrition departments reported staffing challenges¹ ; while 51 percent of afterschool and summer providers reported staffing challenges.²
- **Expand Community Eligibility.** Community eligibility offers an important and viable path forward for schools as they transition from pandemic operations. For the schools that adopted it prior to the pandemic, it transformed their school breakfast and lunch

¹ <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/FNS-Survey-Supply-Chain-Disruptions.pdf>

² <http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Afterschool-COVID-19-Wave-6-Brief.pdf>

programs, allowing schools to offer meals to all students at no charge, which reduces paperwork for schools and families, and eliminates unpaid school meal fees. Most importantly, it ensures that all students have access to the nutritious meals at school that they need to learn and thrive. Under the current rules, too many high need schools are not eligible. For schools that are eligible, the reimbursement structure can keep them from adopting community eligibility. Congress should lower the eligibility threshold to make more schools eligible to implement community eligible and increase the funding (raising the multiplier from 1.6 to 2.5) so that more schools are able to implement community eligibility. And as a growing number of states move to create statewide programs that offer school meals to all students at no charge, offering a statewide community eligibility option can support those efforts.

- **Create a Nationwide Summer EBT Program.** This approach offers an important way to complement the Summer Nutrition Programs. When schools close, families lose access to healthy free or reduced-price school meals for their children. The result is increased food insecurity among families with children. The existing summer nutrition programs are designed to replace school meals and often support much-needed summer programming, but the reach of these meals is too low. Prior to the pandemic, just one child for every seven who count on free or reduced-price school meals during the school year were served a summer meal. A nationwide Summer EBT program would provide families an EBT card to purchase food when schools are closed. Evaluations of Summer EBT demonstrations have found that they reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition.

We look forward to working with you to include these provisions in the upcoming legislative vehicles being developed by Congress.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



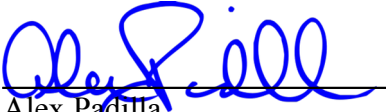
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



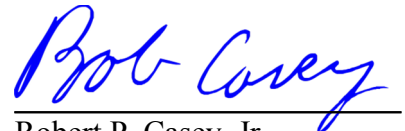
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



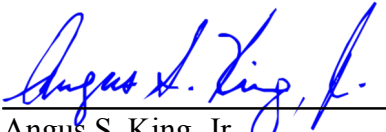
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United States Senator



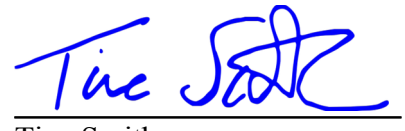
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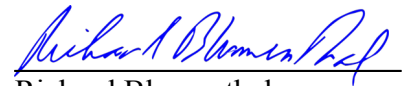
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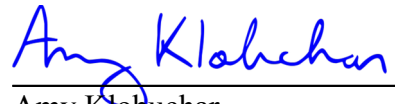
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



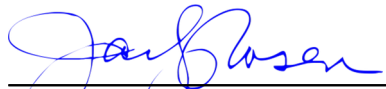
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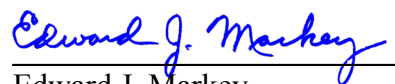
Martin Heinrich
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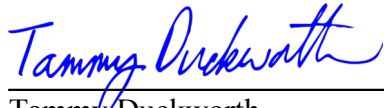
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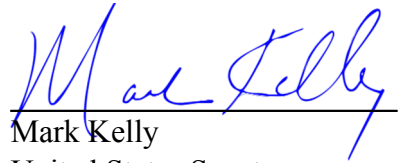
Bernard Sanders
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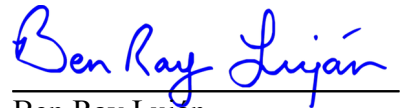
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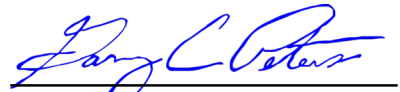
Michael F. Bennet
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Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



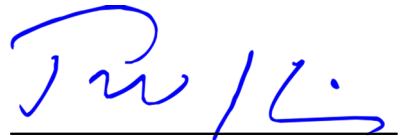
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



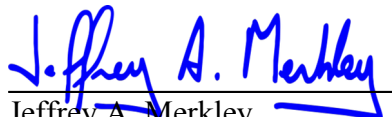
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Christopher S. Murphy
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Tim Kaine
United States Senator



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