

United States Senate

August 20, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independent Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20228

Secretary Perdue:

I am reaching out today to thank you for your work in providing hunger assistance to Montanans during COVID-19 and to ask that you provide additional flexibility going into the fall. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) waivers provide Montana with critical flexibility to administer nutrition programs for kids, families, and seniors while we weather this storm.

First, I ask that you allow schools to provide meals for students using the Summer Food Service Program, rather than the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs for the coming school year. As Montana schools work to resume varying degrees of in-person schooling, the complexity of tracking the free, reduced, or paid status of students will be incredibly burdensome, and could divert time and resources away from other important administrative tasks. Additionally, as economic uncertainty continues, students may be newly eligible for additional assistance, but the application and approval process may pose an unnecessary hurdle to participation. The Summer Food Service Program provides meals to students at no cost, and would ensure that students are not hungry as they navigate their new schooling experience.

USDA also provides a number of waivers to provide flexibility to existing programming so that families do not experience food insecurity during COVID-19. That's why I ask that you extend the following provisions:

- Continue to approve emergency Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) allotments for families and individuals. Providing a temporarily higher level of benefits reduces pressure on food banks, allows folks to maintain a certain degree of normalcy, and is proven to have strong economic returns.
- Extend the nationwide waiver delaying the implementation of USDA's Able Bodied Adult without Dependents (ABAWD) time limit, or approve state waiver requests. This waiver suspends the Food and Nutrition Service requirement that individuals receive assistance for longer than three months. As economic uncertainty continues, those who wish to work may be unable to gain employment, and their food security should not be impacted.
- Extend the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) physical presence waiver beyond September 30, 2020. Continued social distancing measures are in place to protect at-risk individuals like mothers and infants, who should not be required to make in-person visits for nutrition counseling and assistance.

JON TESTER
MONTANA

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I appreciate your time and consideration of these requests. Your swift action will protect vulnerable Montanans from hunger, and provide much-need stability during COVID-19. I look forward to working with you on these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Jon Tester

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