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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025  
<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Peter Gaynor  
Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Administrator Gaynor,

Thank you for your efforts in the response to COVID-19. We are concerned that food assistance to Americans effected by the impact of the virus is too slow. It has been over six weeks since Congress appropriated \$850 million to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and CARES Act to provide food to those who need it. To date, only \$99 million of the total amount appropriated has been obligated, which is concerning considering unemployment claims across the country continue to surge, and there are excessive lines at food banks across the nation.

Last Friday, the Labor Department reported that the unemployment rate rose to 14.7 percent in April. With more people out of work since the great depression, it is inevitable the need for food assistance will also rise.

Another available source for food assistance is the FEMA Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), which has over \$79 billion in available balances, including \$45 billion appropriated through the CARES Act for the immediate needs of state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to protect citizens and help them recovery from the overwhelming effects of COVID-19. To date, however, only \$5.8 billion has been obligated by FEMA in response to COVID-19 requirements, primarily for temporary medical facilities, National Guard deployments, personal protective equipment, and other emergency protective measures.

FEMA policy (FP 104-010-03) issued on April 12, 2020, makes clear that the purchase and distribution of food is an eligible expense through the DRF and that FEMA will work with USDA to prevent any duplication of benefit. As the operational lead for COVID-19, we call on FEMA to be more proactive in using all of its authorities and available resources to help accelerate the distribution of food to those in need across the country.

Whether making DRF funding quickly available to distribute food or providing assistance to grow the capacity to distribute food safely, we believe FEMA has the authority and capacity to deliver food to those who need it faster than the cumbersome status quo process being used by USDA. We urge you to coordinate with other agencies, such as USDA and governors, to ensure food assistance is reaching those most in need.

Sincerely,



Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
Appropriations Committee



Jon Tester  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security