

March 8, 2022

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
U.S. Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representative
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Extending USDA Flexibility on School Nutrition

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Republican Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Republican Leader McCarthy:

As the co-chairs of the Bipartisan Policy Center's Food and Nutrition Security Task Force, we write to urge you to allow for an extension of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) authority to extend waivers in the food and nutrition arena that have provided schools with flexibility to procure products, cook, serve, and provide nutritious meals to the nation's children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, 7.6% of U.S. households with children experienced food insecurity. People with food insecurity are more likely to have obesity. Childhood obesity is even more common than childhood food insecurity, with one in five children and adolescents ages 2-19 having obesity. These challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beginning in the Trump Administration and continuing into the current Biden Administration, USDA has had the flexibility to grant waivers that have allowed schools to serve universal free meals during the pandemic and waive some requirements to provide more flexibility in procuring key food items. That flexibility expires on June 30, 2022, and school nutrition program operators, serving over 30 million children daily, are in need of regulatory certainty as they plan and prepare for the upcoming school year.

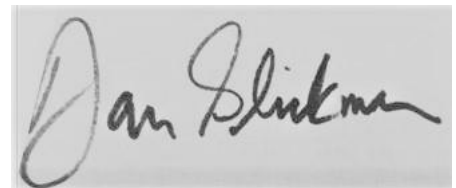
BPC's Food and Nutrition Security Task Force issued [recommendations](#) earlier this year focusing on child nutrition programs. One recommendation was to ensure all children, regardless of household income, have access to nutritious foods to allow them to learn and grow by providing school meals to all students at no cost. We recognize the investments needed in order to implement this policy and have included policy options that would make progress toward the ultimate goal of universal free school meals.

As you know, food and nutrition security are vital to ensure a robust learning environment as well as a child's long-term health and well-being. Extending the USDA waiver authority for these feeding programs will continue to ensure schools have the flexibility to offer healthy and nutritious foods to children. There is bipartisan support for continuing these authorities for the upcoming school year and we urge you to include an extension in the FY2022 Appropriations omnibus currently being finalized.

Sincerely,



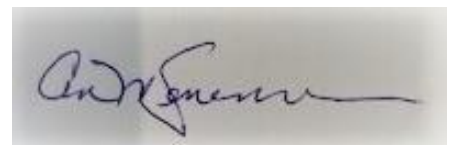
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CO-CHAIR
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