

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20510**

March 24, 2022

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for your continued commitment to feeding our nation's students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) work to implement pandemic-related child nutrition waivers created by Congress has been critical to ensuring that students in Hawaii and across the country receive meals. As our country continues to navigate the pandemic, Congress will continue its efforts to make sure schools have the resources they need to reopen safely and remain open during the 2022-2023 school year. In the meantime, we request that USDA take every step possible to extend these vital waivers for the upcoming school year and next summer—through September 30, 2023.

Pandemic-related child nutrition waivers created by Congress through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127) and implemented by USDA have been critical to making sure students receive meals during the COVID-19 pandemic—especially as states, school districts, and schools have continued to face challenges caused by COVID-19. The flexibilities provided by these waivers have helped feed many students who would have otherwise gone hungry due to increased difficulties faced by school districts and nonprofits who feed students.

We have heard directly from our state about the effectiveness of waivers in allowing school districts and nonprofits to feed students. With the waivers, for example, Kaukau 4 Keiki, a federally-funded, public-private partnership established last summer, was able to serve 700,000 meals during a short, two-month period (June 2021-July 2021)—increasing food security for 88 percent of those who participated in its programs. A further extension of the waivers is vital in order to ensure partnerships like these will be able to operate beyond June 2022.

There are numerous other examples of how the waivers have helped school districts and nonprofits feed students. Whether by providing schools with more flexibility on timing of meals to promote greater social distancing, allowing schools to streamline serving processes to alleviate

administrative burdens at a time when many remain understaffed, allowing families to pick up “grab-and-go” meals, or addressing challenges caused by supply chain issues, these waivers have been effective at feeding students. Without these flexibilities, tens of thousands of meals may not have been distributed on certain days, and thousands of children may have gone hungry.

USDA’s commitment to ensuring more students receive meals by implementing these waivers has benefited families and communities all across the country. While we look forward to having all students permanently return to healthy and safe in-person learning environments in the near future, there is a clear possibility states, school districts, and schools will continue to face challenges through the 2022-2023 school year.

By further extending pandemic-related child nutrition waivers through September 30, 2023, USDA would ensure school districts and nonprofits have continued flexibility to feed students through next year. Failure to extend these waivers could force thousands of children and families back into food insecurity overnight, an avoidable and unacceptable outcome. To ensure no child goes hungry, we strongly urge you to provide a further extension of the following waivers:

- **Mealtime Waivers**
- **Congregate Feeding Waivers**
- **Parent Guardian Pickup Presence Waivers**
- **First Week Site Waivers**
- **Area Eligibility Waivers**
- **Meal Pattern Waivers**
- **Summer Food Service Reimbursement Rate Waivers**

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

Ed Case

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Ed Case  
Member of Congress



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Kaiuli'i Kahele  
Member of Congress