

United States Senate

April 27, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to urge reconsideration of the blanket denial of waiver requests from states wishing to maintain eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for college students who have lost their employment due to COVID-19. Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia requested these waivers on current restrictions for students to receive food assistance, signaling that the issue was serious enough to warrant the prompt attention of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), and the Agency's actions in response imply a lack of concern for this already vulnerable population.

Recent widespread closures at our nation's colleges and universities have interrupted semesters and disrupted lives during this unprecedented national crisis. Emergency proclamations leading to the closure of retail and food service businesses, among others, have further exacerbated this disruption and increased financial strain on workers, including college students. Congress has provided resources to support students affected by these closures, and may provide further assistance in the future. However, more can be done in the meantime.

Even before these closures, many college students were food insecure. Last year, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) documented numerous studies that indicated food insecurity is prevalent among college students, estimating that more than 30 percent of student study participants were close to food insecure. GAO's report only confirms what we have heard from students, schools, service providers, and others. College has become increasingly more expensive, and, while many students work in order to afford to attend school, a substantial number are still food insecure.

FNS has worked with state agencies on waivers that increase flexibility with reporting parameters, application and certification, and emergency allotments. It is important to continue to ensure that the needs of vulnerable populations, including college students, do not go unaddressed in this time of extreme and unpredictable economic conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a number of weaknesses at various points in our food supply chain, and we should be responding by taking actions that increase access to food security for those who are currently, or are on the verge of being, food insecure.

It is for these reasons that we request USDA immediately reconsider the sweeping denial of waiver requests seeking the temporary waiving of the work requirement imposed on college students and allow students who lose their employment to continue to receive SNAP benefits for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator