

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We are writing to urge you and your staff to work expeditiously to exercise the flexibilities granted to you in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and the CARES Act to provide emergency assistance to individuals and families already experiencing the strain of this pandemic.

Nearly 2 million Illinoisans already depend on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to meet their nutritional needs. Illinois is also among the states that has issued a Stay-In-Place order to prevent the spread of this virus, resulting in thousands of people losing work hours or their jobs altogether until at least April 7th. This need for food assistance will only increase as more and more Illinoisans feel the economic impact caused by COVID-19 and the necessary response to temporarily put lives over livelihood.

To ensure that state and local organizations are able to respond effectively to the evolving situation on the ground and that those in need are able to access needed benefits, we urge you to provide the utmost flexibility and support to the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), which oversee federal nutrition programs in Illinois. There are three requests for which I request your immediate action:

- **Enhance use of telephonic signatures for SNAP applications.** With the state operating under a Stay-In-Place order and only 14 local IDHS offices open across Illinois, SNAP participants are being encouraged to use phone and online methods to apply for and manage benefits. Community Based Organizations (CBOs) are an important partner in supporting SNAP outreach and application assistance and can help the state assist SNAP applicants over the phone, especially as IDHS experiences higher demand. However, CBOs need to be authorized to collect client signatures over the phone, whether recording audio files with telephonic signatures, accepting vocal attestation from the client, or acting as the client's authorized representative. We urge USDA to grant states the utmost flexibility in allowing CBOs to collect client signatures over the phone.

- **Approve the implementation of a disaster household food distribution program.** Across Illinois, food banks are working tirelessly to ensure that emergency food programs remain accessible and safe. With declines in product and volunteers coupled with increased demand, food banks require the utmost flexibility to be able to respond to the evolving circumstances in their communities. We urge USDA to approve IDHS's request to implement a disaster household food distribution program, allowing our emergency food system to respond to our community's needs swiftly and safely.
- **Approve TEFAP simplified address verification during client intake.** TEFAP requires that emergency food providers record name, address, and other client information during intake. It is important that USDA allow for simplified address verification. Specifically, food banks need to be able to record a client's zip code rather than their full address. With long lines and reduced volunteers, individually recording client addresses is especially time consuming. It also increases the amount of time that pantry staff, volunteers, and clients must be in proximity to one another.

Congress acted quickly to provide the authority the U.S. Department of Agriculture requires to ensure that Americans impacted by this pandemic have the food resources they need now. On behalf of families in Illinois, we implore you to act quickly as well to ensure that all Americans have the food they need during this difficult time.

Sincerely,



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Bradley S. Schneider
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress