

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 25, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write today concerning the ongoing public health crisis caused by the spread of COVID-19 and the unprecedented nutrition challenges children in Virginia and across the country are facing. We appreciate all the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is doing to meet this unique challenge, including waiving the congregate meal requirements for child nutrition programs. However, we believe more must be done to ensure children in Virginia continue to have access to healthy and nutritious meals during this state of emergency.

Current USDA regulations prohibit school districts from distributing meals to families unless the child is present. While we understand the need for this policy under normal circumstances, the current public health emergency demonstrates a clear need for flexibility in food distribution policies to ensure every child has access to a healthy meal. The current policy is burdensome on families and places children at increased risk – especially those who are immunocompromised. This creates a difficult situation for some families who must decide between potentially placing their children at risk of infection and skipping meals.

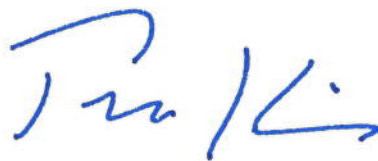
To meet the nutrition needs of all children during the current public health crisis, we request that USDA establish guidelines for states that remove the in-person requirements for families with at-risk children to reduce unnecessary exposure to COVID-19. Removing this restriction would go a long way to ensuring children in Virginia have access to healthy meals during this public health emergency and are not placed at undue risk.

Again, thank you for your attention to this matter and all you are doing to ensure children have access to healthy and nutritious foods during this challenging time. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator