

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 14, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write today in support of the Commonwealth of Virginia's request to participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Online Purchasing Pilot Program. Inclusion in this program will allow Virginia SNAP recipients to use their benefits to purchase groceries online from authorized retailers, reducing the risk of exposure to the coronavirus for thousands of individuals in the Commonwealth.

The current public health crisis has resulted in an unprecedented rise in unemployment and a subsequent increase in demand for our nation's anti-hunger programs, including SNAP. While USDA has moved swiftly to reduce barriers and increase access to this program during the current public health emergency, most SNAP recipients are only able to utilize these benefits in person at grocery stores or other retailers. This requirement places SNAP recipients at higher risk of infection, as they are not able to utilize various online grocery delivery services that are available for other consumers.

The 2014 Farm Bill required USDA to establish a pilot program to test the feasibility of SNAP beneficiaries utilizing their benefits online with authorized retailers. To date, only a small number of states are authorized to participate in this program and have set up systems to allow SNAP recipients in their respective states to use their benefits with online retailers. Due to the current public health emergency, we understand USDA is working to add interested states to the program on a case-by-case basis if they meet the requirements to administer the online program.

To ensure the health and safety of SNAP beneficiaries in the Commonwealth, we urge USDA to work with the Virginia Department of Social Services to approve Virginia's request to participate in the Department's SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot as quickly as possible. We also urge USDA to do everything within its power to expand this program nationwide so SNAP recipients across the country have the option to use online grocery delivery options and reduce their exposure to COVID-19.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure every American has access to healthy and nutritious foods during this public health emergency.

Sincerely,

MARK R. WARNER  
United States Senator

TIM Kaine  
United States Senator