

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 23, 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 operate a Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program during the ongoing public health crisis. This program will allow households that contain children who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals to receive a supplemental food purchasing benefit to offset the cost of meals that would have been provided at school. Operation of this program will help ensure that children across the Commonwealth will continue to have access to healthy and nutritious foods during this health emergency.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced school closures nationwide, including in Virginia. In the Commonwealth, all K-12 schools remain closed through the end of this academic year. While this is a critical and necessary step to keep children, their families, and staff safe, these closures have eliminated the congregate food distribution that many children rely on as their primary source of nutrition during the week. The closure of schools across Virginia has made it difficult to ensure these students are able to access healthy and nutritious meals, which are essential for their growth and development.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 provided the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with authority to expand eligibility and the level of benefits available under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008. By providing households with free and reduced-price lunch eligible children with supplemental benefits for meals through the existing EBT program's distribution mechanism, the bill ensures that many families will be able to meet the nutritional needs of their children during this crisis. We understand USDA is working with states and EBT vendors to implement P-EBT programs and that a handful of states have already been approved to begin operating programs.

To ensure no child in Virginia goes hungry, we urge USDA to work with the Commonwealth of Virginia to approve the Commonwealth's request to operate a P-EBT program in a timely manner. This P-EBT program will provide Virginia with another critical tool to help keep families fed during this difficult time.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and all you and your staff are doing to help keep Americans fed during this public health crisis. We look forward to continue working with you to ensure access to healthy and nutritious foods for all Americans.

Sincerely,

/s/ Mark R. Warner
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine
Tim Kaine
United States Senator