

April 23, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue,

Over 200,000 students in West Virginia rely on free or reduced lunch. I could not be prouder of our West Virginia schools, the school service personnel, and their numerous community partners who are doing everything in their power to continue providing meals to our students in need during this pandemic, but this is no easy task. Never before have we faced an enemy quite like this, and our success requires all of us working together. I thank you for the flexibility you have provided thus far to our school systems through the Child Nutrition Waivers, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure all West Virginia students have access to healthy meals.

The waivers you have already granted have allowed our school systems, which have been closed since March 16, 2020, to serve in excess of 1 million meals a week to our students. I was proud to work with you to extend the Nationwide Meal Pattern Waiver on March 25, 2020 that allows schools to provide meals containing the “best available food options” if they are unable to obtain certain food items required for Child Nutrition Programs and still receive federal reimbursement. Without this waiver, if schools run into food supply issues, many simply could not afford to continue providing meals. As you know, this waiver remains in effect until April 30, 2020 or until the expiration of the federally declared public health emergency, whichever is earlier. I urge you to extend this waiver through June 30, 2020 to better align it with the other Child Nutrition Program nationwide waivers already approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my support for the West Virginia State Plan application for Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) established under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127). West Virginia submitted this request on Monday, April 13, 2020. Approval of this request would help the school systems provide over 200,000 students with additional opportunities to access food while our schools remain closed. If approved, the school systems would be allowed to provide each eligible household with about \$7 per child, per school day on an EBT card. This level of support is consistent with the standard reimbursement rate per child during the school year. This commonsense program will bring peace of mind to children across West Virginia who lack access to reliable transportation and depend on these healthy meals every day for a balanced diet.

Again, I appreciate the flexibility and support that have been provided thus far to our school systems that allow them to provide meals to all those who rely on them. I am encouraged by the progress we have made, and I am committed to continue working with you to ensure that no child goes hungry while our schools are closed. Thank you for attention to this important issue.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator