

The Honorable Shontel M. Brown
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food, and Drug Administration, and
Related Agencies
May 25, 2022

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Harris, and members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to work with Representative Meng to craft report language that addresses key child nutrition issues. Congresswoman Meng is a proven leader in fighting hunger and strengthening food security, and I am honored to join Ms. Meng in the effort to ensure no child goes hungry.

Due to the public health emergency and subsequent economic fallout, childhood hunger has spiked dramatically. Data¹ shows that student participation in the school breakfast and lunch programs has dropped significantly. The waiver authorities that Congress gave USDA through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act have made it possible for school nutrition programs and community organizations to continue to feed students in wake of school closures, virtual learning, and social distancing, as well as the challenges faced by ongoing supply chain disruptions and staffing shortages. Unfortunately, these critical waivers are set to expire at the end of June. This creates uncertainty as schools prepare for the next school year. It is important that Congress fully recognizes how useful and critical these waivers have been and continue to be.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to include language accompanying the final agriculture appropriations bill that expresses the Committee's support for the child nutrition waivers authorized in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and directs the Secretary of Agriculture to submit a report to Congress on the effectiveness and use of these waivers.

Additionally, we must ensure that children are being fed year-round, including in the summers. For millions of children, summer is the hungriest time of year. With school buses not running and feeding sites often at different locations for multiple children in one household, few children can get to meal sites twice or even once a day in the summer. This is a serious issue that children living in both rural and urban areas face.

Therefore, I am urging the Committee to include language accompanying the final agriculture appropriations bill that highlights support for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service and allows State Agencies to enable the Summer Food Service Program service institutions that operate in areas where children and youth have barriers to access to a congregate feeding site to use their reimbursement payments to develop creative ways to make food available to children through non-congregate means.

Thank you again, Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Harris, and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony. I stand ready to work with you all to help fight child food insecurity.

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/05/06/the-covid-19-crisis-has-already-left-too-many-children-hungry-in-america/>

