

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write regarding implementation of H.R. 6201, the *Family First Coronavirus Response Act* – Congress' most recent response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Specifically, H.R. 6201 authorizes the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to approve state plans to provide emergency benefits (*Pandemic EBT*) to households with children who, if not for COVID-19 related school closures of no less than 5 consecutive days, would receive free or reduced-price school meals.

As you work to implement this new legislative authority, we urge you to move quickly to issue guidance to state agencies that provides broad flexibility in program design and allows states to tailor their program to best fit their unique needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, the Pandemic EBT guidance must include the flexibility for state agencies to:

1. Certify and issue benefits to eligible households using innovative strategies that limit the spread of COVID-19;
2. Streamline the certification process and eliminate unnecessary procedures, such as the need for households to submit an application, appear at an interview, provide verification or submit periodic reports;
3. Allow approved households to use their benefits to purchase food for home consumption and ready-to-eat hot foods;
4. Partner with non-profits and community organizations to assist with certifying eligible households for benefits;
5. Use available funds to cover all costs, including any associated administrative costs;
6. Issue benefits to approved households within a reasonable time frame that provides the maximum amount of flexibility for interested states, particularly those experiencing changes in staff levels as a result of the pandemic, to develop and submit plans for approval; and

7. Submit any required reports to USDA at a frequency that takes into consideration the potential impact of COVID-19 on a state agency's ability to meet such a requirement.

Given the growing number of school closures nationwide, USDA must act swiftly to provide states with clarity on Pandemic EBT to ensure low-income children without access to school meals receive assistance as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



**MARCIA L. FUDGE**  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight and  
Department Operation  
Committee on Agriculture



**ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT**  
Chair  
Committee on Education and Labor