September 20, 2021

Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations

Honorable Patrick Leahy Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations

Honorable Sanborn Bishop, Jr. Chairman
House Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Honorable Tammy Baldwin Chairwoman
Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Honorable Kay Granger Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations

Honorable Richard Shelby Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations

Honorable Jeff Fortenberry Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Honorable John Hoeven Ranking Member
Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Granger, Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Fortenberry, Chairwoman Baldwin, Ranking Member Hoeven,

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress gave the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) the authority to grant nationwide child nutrition waivers, allowing school nutrition programs and nonprofit organizations to adapt as necessary to changes such as school closures and virtual learning. This authority was extended through the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act. Without these waivers, the child nutrition programs would not have been able to adequately respond to the fallout from COVID-19. These programs administered by USDA have been a backbone of our country’s pandemic response to childhood hunger.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. Families continue to need support, and school nutrition departments and community sponsors are struggling to operate under the unique circumstances created by the pandemic. Contrary to where many people thought and hoped we would be at this point in the pandemic, COVID-19 continues to be a threat and the Delta variant is more contagious than previous strains and causing an increase in pediatric cases. It is unclear when schools and community organizations will be able to return to normal operations, particularly in light of the number of students quarantining in response to outbreaks, the expected spike in the winter months and future variants of COVID-19 that may develop.
The authority to provide a nationwide waiver, even if it increases program costs, is set to expire on September 30, 2021. We, the undersigned organizations, ask Congress to extend USDA’s nationwide waiver authority to September 30, 2022 to ensure they have the flexibility needed to respond to the pandemic and ensure that the federal child nutrition programs continue to operate and provide healthy snacks and meals to the students who need them.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Afterschool Alliance
American Commodity Distribution Association
American Heart Association
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Bread for the World
Center for Biological Diversity
Children’s Defense Fund
Feeding America
First Focus Campaign for Children
FoodCorps
Food Research & Action Center
MomsRising
National Education Association
National Farm to School Network
National PTA
National Recreation and Park Association
School Nutrition Association
Urban School Food Alliance
YMCA of the USA