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March 3, 2022

Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer and Leader McConnell:

I write to ask that the omnibus continue to provide USDA authority to issue all necessary waivers, including an extension of all authority provided by FFCRA for state and nationwide waivers from June 30, 2022 to September 30, 2023.

Nutrition providers across Colorado have worked quickly transforming systems to be responsive to our kids and communities during the COVID 19 pandemic. They have been able to successfully expand access to healthy meals and afterschool programming for underserved families, serve the whole child through learning-connected resources, and ensure safe and efficient food delivery outside of a congregate setting. Additionally, this work has reduced the amount of food waste and benefited the economy through local hiring and food sourcing.

Colorado's children and families have been and continue to be greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is critical that their nutrition lifeline is not abruptly halted. Furthermore, nutrition providers need to plan budgets and menus for the next school year right now, while responding to the current needs of their community, and they need certainty as to requirements and eligibility criteria.

I believe that extending the authority to issue state and nationwide waivers through September 30, 2023 will benefit school administrators, personnel, and industry partners who supply food to child nutrition programs. The flexibilities afforded through the following waivers, created at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, have allowed for new, innovative structures to serve children and families, including wraparound programming:

- The Waiver to Allow Meal Service Time Flexibility (COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response #1, expires June 30, 2022); without this waiver, delivery and consumption of meals must follow specific time requirements.

- The Waiver to Allow Non-congregate Feeding (COVID–19: Child Nutrition Response #2, expires June 30, 2022); without this waiver, meals must be served and consumed on site in a congregate setting.
- The Waiver to Allow Parents and Guardians to Pick Up Meals (COVID–19: Child Nutrition Response #5, expires June 30, 2022); without this waiver, meals can typically only be served directly to kids.
- At-risk Area Eligibility Waiver (COVID–19: Child Nutrition Response #93, expires June 30, 2022); without this waiver, meal eligibility is often restricted to specific kids and areas.

I request that the omnibus continue to provide authority to issue the child nutrition waivers through the 2022-2023 school year so that nutrition providers can continue providing healthy meals to children and families across Colorado.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael F. Bennet". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being the most prominent part.

U.S. Senator Michael F. Bennet