

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 4, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to express our serious concern that your Department is once again taking steps that are likely to increase hunger and food insecurity in Maryland and the District of Columbia.

At the start of the coronavirus pandemic outbreak, the Department – rightly – took action to remove bureaucratic obstacles to hungry Americans accessing nutrition assistance. Unfortunately, it is our understanding that the Department recently informed both Maryland and the District of Columbia that it would not renew waivers allowing those jurisdictions to forgo income recertifications during the pandemic.

The original decision to waive recertifications recognized that in-person visits to government offices are not safe. That reality, unfortunately, has not changed. The pandemic has not disappeared; instead, it is resurging. As a result, local department of social service offices are not open, and their staffs are working remotely, making “interviews” problematic at best. While the Department suggests that recertifications could be completed online, that is simply not realistic. Our human services agencies have not had sufficient time to put new technologies in place and ensure that they will work as intended. More importantly, many beneficiaries do not have the ability to access online services, particularly with many public institutions that provide free computer access shut down by the virus.

Moreover, the decision not to renew these waivers cannot be justified by economic circumstances. Hunger has not disappeared; instead, recent reports indicate that 30 million Americans are food insecure. The economy has not roared back to life; instead, we learned last week that GDP in the second quarter suffered its biggest decline since modern record-keeping began and that unemployment

claims were on the rise again, with numerous other indicators suggesting that any economic resurgence has, at best, stalled out and, at worst, gone into reverse.

Given these facts, the decision to end the waivers will result in increased hunger and unnecessarily worsen the economic plight of thousands of residents in the region. We urge you to reverse it and extend these waivers for the duration of the pandemic.

Sincerely,

/s/ Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ C. A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

/s/ John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

/s/ Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

/s/ Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/ David Trone
Member of Congress

/s/ Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress

/s/ Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress