Feeding America COVID-19 Priorities

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing significant impact to individuals and families across the country. Over 36 million people have filed for unemployment since the start of this crisis. Feeding America estimates that an additional 17 million of our neighbors could face hunger as a result of the pandemic, increasing food insecurity in the United States to 54.3 million people. This would increase the rate of food insecurity by 46 percent. Funding provided in earlier COVID-19 legislation has helped provide emergency SNAP and TEFAP resources to individuals in need and the Feeding America network of 200 food banks, but additional food and funds will be needed to help meet the need throughout the pandemic and economic recovery.

As Congress works on additional legislation to help families weather this crisis, we ask support for:

- Increasing SNAP benefits for all recipients by increasing the maximum benefit by 15 percent for the duration of the economic downturn to provide critical food assistance and to help promote economic stimulus. This will provide critical food resources for families and relieve some of the pressure on our network.
- Increasing the SNAP minimum benefit from $16 to $30 to help individuals impacted by COVID-19, particularly seniors, for the duration of the economic downturn.
- Extend Pandemic-EBT authority provided in earlier legislation to ensure USDA has the authority needed to continue this important program through the summer and into the next school year as needed.
- Increased funding of $500 million for TEFAP food purchases to follow the increases included in previous legislation as well as funding for storage and distribution needs to help our food bank network continue to meet the unprecedented demand in our communities.
- Invest $543 million in the cold storage and transportation capacity of the nation’s charitable food system.

INCREASE SNAP BENEFITS TO HELP PEOPLE AND THE ECONOMY

SNAP is the nation’s first line of defense against hunger. Before this crisis, SNAP served 37 million low-income Americans, providing benefits that are timely, targeted, and temporary.

We need SNAP investments now more than ever. SNAP is an economic multiplier, infusing money into local economies. SNAP is vital to the individuals and families who were already food insecure, as well as the millions of newly-unemployed individuals. Every dollar spent in SNAP benefits helps generate between $1.50 and $1.80 in economic activity. Increasing the SNAP maximum benefit by 15 percent would stimulate the economy and ensure people facing hunger have access to the meals they need.
The charitable food system cannot do this alone. For every meal provided by our food banks, SNAP provides nine – there is no way that our network can make up for the unparalleled strength of SNAP to increase food security and stimulate local economies.

EXTEND PANDEMIC-EBT AUTHORITY

The Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program allows states to provide resources on an EBT card to participants in free and reduced-price lunch when schools are closed longer than 5 days. The authority for P-EBT expires in June as schools close for summer. Congress must act to extend this important program through the summer and the next school year as needed to ensure this program option can continue to operate and feed children when schools are closed and meals are not available.

INCREASE TEFAP FUNDING TO SUPPORT FOOD BANKS

The dramatic increase in federal commodities that our nation’s food banks are distributing began with the introduction of the USDA’s Food Purchase and Distribution Program last year. USDA has also announced additional food purchases through Section 32 and the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program Farmers to Families Food Boxes. We are grateful for the USDA foods that help our network to meet some of the increased demand. At the same time, these increased volumes of perishable food are stressing the capacity of food banks and agency partners.

Specifically, we are experiencing an acute need for additional cold storage capacity and vehicles to distribute federal commodities.

We ask you to provide $500 million for TEFAP food purchases to follow the increases included in previous legislation as well as funding for storage and distribution needs to help our food bank network continue to meet the unprecedented demand in our communities.

PROVIDE FUNDING TO SUPPORT FOOD BANK INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Food banks across the country are struggling to acquire the coolers, freezers, refrigerated and dry trucks, and trailers necessary to efficiently store and distribute food across their service areas. To address this need we request an investment of $543,250,000 to support the rental, lease, or purchase of these essential assets across the network of food banks and partner distribution agencies. Such an investment will allow us to meet the ongoing needs related to the current pandemic and ensure we are prepared to respond to future crises. It will also be an immediate infusion of dollars in local economies that need the support