

April 7, 2020

As Congress develops urgently needed additional legislation to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we thank you for what you've done so far to help families and workers in need. On behalf of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, we ask that you include critical expansions in key essential areas in the next coronavirus response package in addition to other needed public supports (including direct income payments, tax credits, unemployment insurance, Medicaid funding increases, housing assistance, and disability protections):

1. Better supports for nutrition assistance to combat hunger caused by disruptions to work and school;
2. Necessary worker safety protection measures; and
3. Paid sick time and paid family and medical leave for all workers.

In sum, we urge that in the next package, Congress provide:

1) Vital nutrition assistance that reaches families in need:

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

- Strengthen SNAP by increasing the maximum benefit available to all households by 15 percent and increasing the minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30 through the longer-term economic downturn, rather than the immediate public health emergency.
- Double SNAP fruit and vegetable incentives (the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program or GusNIP) for a total of \$100 million for increased use at grocery stores, farmers' markets that are still open, and other food retailers. This is a clear win-win: making fresh produce more affordable and available is important to ensure access to healthy, nutritious food at a time when the produce industry is suffering.
- Suspend the three-month time limit on SNAP benefits for adults not raising minor children that face barriers to work. This suspension should last for as long as the economy and families are vulnerable (the Families First Coronavirus Response Act currently suspends it for only the length of the public health emergency).
- Cease implementing any and all restrictive USDA SNAP regulations that would cut and take benefits away from millions of people and eliminate any paperwork requirements that cannot be processed or addressed if workers are at home
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) should allow all SNAP participants to use their benefits online from a range of retailers, including to purchase nutritious foods from small and mid-size farmers that have turned to online sales to compensate for the loss of wholesale buyers.
- Expand Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP), allowing the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to play a role in this and future pandemics. Senator Harris introduced the Pandemic Assistance Disaster Act, which (at the discretion of a governor and the president) would allow individuals to apply for D-SNAP benefits during this public health emergency. Specifically, individuals already on SNAP could get full benefits and those not already on SNAP could access benefits with expanded eligibility. The bill also directs USDA to make it easier to access benefits,

including by providing enrollment and recertification options other than through an in-person interview.

School meals programs

- Direct USDA to provide immediate flexibility to schools to serve items in bulk rather than individually packaged, ensuring alignment with school meal patterns, and provide funding based on food inventory rather than per-meal reimbursement through the course of the pandemic.
- In conjunction with USDA, require FEMA to coordinate school meal distribution through the course of the pandemic.
- Extend Pandemic SNAP (P-EBT) for families who qualify for school meals and cannot access school meals due to closures through the summer.
- Provide funding relief for school nutrition programs to cover costs incurred during the pandemic response and school closures.
- Ease the administrative burden for school food service programs as they transition back in the next school year.
- Increase Section 32 funding to the Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. \$200 million should be available through DoD Fresh immediately to ensure schools have adequate access to fresh fruit and vegetables. Another \$100 million should fund the DoD Fresh Summer Food Service Pilot Program to automatically include all states and territories that participate in the program.
- Increase funding for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP).
- Provide additional funding for School Meal Kitchen Equipment Grants.

Farmers and emergency feeding providers

- Congress should expand USDA financial assistance to small and mid-size farms threatened by the pandemic. Farmers who normally sell to restaurants are abandoning mature crops because they have no buyers and cannot pay workers. Targeted aid would allow farmers in need to sell and donate nutritious food directly to food banks.

2) Critical safety protections for workers that:

- Ensure all workers have Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other important workplace safeguards to protect their health, particularly for frontline workers such as grocery store and other food retailer workers, school food service staff, and emergency feeding providers like food bank and pantry workers, and essential food supply chain workers, including agrarian, slaughterhouse, and other workers employed by the food industry. [Nine out of ten Americans agree that we should have paid sick leave for grocery store workers, according to a recent national poll commissioned by CSPI.](#)
- Require the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard to protect health care and other high-risk workers with adequate levels of PPE and other appropriate protections.

3) Paid sick leave for all workers to promote equality and protect public health that would:

- Require paid leave, regardless of employer size, including for those caring for seniors. The P.A.I.D. Leave Act should be included in the next package. It requires the federal government to fund 7 days of accrued paid sick leave, 14 days of emergency paid sick leave, and 12 weeks of emergency paid family and medical leave for all employees during the COVID-19 pandemic (until January 2022) and in future public health emergencies. It also establishes permanent requirements for paid sick and safe days, and family and medical leave, even outside of public

health emergencies. Ensuring that workers have paid sick leave is critical to protecting public health.

- Require any company taking taxpayer dollars to fully protect worker wages and benefits during the crisis.

Congress must quickly pass these crucial provisions as a part of the next COVID package. Please don't hesitate to contact us with questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Laura MacCleery
Policy Director

Colin Schwartz
Deputy Director, Legislative Affairs

Center for Science in the Public Interest
1220 L Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20005