



April 6, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Democratic Leader
S-221 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-222 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McConnell, Schumer, and McCarthy:

On behalf of Feeding America and our network of member food banks, thank you for your work on the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Together, these two laws will help our network meet the increase in need for charitable food assistance and connect people with aid from the federal nutrition programs. We face an unprecedented increase in demand, and swift additional legislative action will be key to our ability to help Americans weather this crisis. In many areas, our food banks are concerned that they will not have enough food on hand. While we are grateful for the generous investments in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), our network will need additional assistance in the coming months. It is also clear that no amount of charitable intervention will be enough to meet the need without an accompanying increase in benefits in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Summary of Recommendations:

- Increase SNAP benefits by at least 15 percent for as long as the economy is weak, not just during the public health emergency, to provide effective economic stimulus and critical food assistance.
- Increase the SNAP minimum monthly benefit from \$16 to \$30.
- Increase TEFAP food and funding.

Current Impact on Feeding America Network

Food banks in many areas are already struggling to keep up with demand, with individuals in some communities waiting hours for emergency food distributions. With more than 10 million people having filed for unemployment benefits during the last two weeks, we believe the urgent need for food assistance will continue to increase. Feeding America has analyzed the potential impact of the pandemic and we predict up to an additional 17.1 million people could experience food insecurity, a 46 percent increase from the 37 million who were food insecure prior to the outbreak of the pandemic.

In order to help quantify the need for resources across our network, Feeding America conducted a pulse survey of our food banks on April 2. Every one of our 200 member food banks reported a significant increase in the need for food assistance in their communities, with an average 60 percent increase in demand. Operating costs for food banks have also increased as volunteers stay home in accordance with federal recommendations.

Food banks reported concerns about finding and accessing additional food in the immediate short term. 20 percent of food banks are concerned about running out of food in the next two to four weeks. 45 percent of food banks will distribute all TEFAP food on hand within the next four weeks. Food banks are struggling to find shelf stable food to purchase for immediate food distribution as the supply chain adjusts.

The additional TEFAP food provided by Congress in recent legislation will help to fill this gap, but it is not expected to arrive until July. We are working closely with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help fill this gap, and request your support in urging them to work proactively to provide short-term food assistance for food banks experiencing a food shortfall until additional TEFAP food starts arriving.

We also surveyed our network regarding how easily they can distribute food during the pandemic while also meeting the federal regulatory requirements for TEFAP food. Even while nearly half will distribute all food on hand in the coming weeks, over seventy-four food banks report experiencing difficulty in safely complying with TEFAP program requirements due to COVID-19, a number we expect to increase as the pandemic continues and more areas of the country experience significant disruption.

Food banks are struggling to help millions of people access emergency food assistance for the first time while trying to register them for TEFAP. This process requires lengthy client interaction that could expose staff, volunteers, or the people we serve to the disease as they collect data. States can request permission for a disaster household distribution program under which USDA may waive these requirements. Unfortunately, this process has been unpredictable, and we urge either a legislative or administrative fix to this challenge.

Recommendations for Future Legislation

As you craft future legislation, we urge you to include additional funding for federal nutrition programs like SNAP and TEFAP during the pandemic and any economic downturn that follows. We remain concerned about our ability to identify enough resources to offset the increased food needs and distribution challenges, despite the incredible generosity of individuals and companies. For people who need economic support, increasing benefits and expanding access to SNAP during the pandemic and economic recovery can provide necessary food resources while also providing an economic stimulus to our nation's food retailers.

For every meal provided by our food banks, SNAP provides nine – there is simply no way that our network can make up for the unparalleled strength of SNAP to increase food security and stimulate local economies. Households typically spend their monthly benefits quickly, making SNAP a particularly effective stimulus in providing quick support to local economies. According to an analysis by Moody's Analytics of SNAP benefits during the recession in 2009, every dollar in SNAP helped generate more than \$1.70 in economic activity. Similarly, the Congressional Budget Office rated an increase in SNAP benefits as one of the most cost-effective ways to boost economic growth and create jobs in a weak economy. Given the importance of SNAP, we also oppose the implementation of any pending rules that would limit SNAP eligibility and benefits.

Specifically, we urge you to include the following provisions in future legislation:

SNAP:

- Increase SNAP benefits for all recipients by increasing the thrifty food plan by at least 15 percent for as long as the economy is weak to help promote economic stimulus and push against the economic downturn. This will provide critical food resources for families and

relieve some of the pressure on our network.

- Increase the SNAP minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30 to help individuals impacted by COVID-19, particularly seniors, for the duration of the economic downturn.

Increase TEFAP food and funding:

- Given the unique challenges our network will face to distribute food in accordance with recommendations to reduce spread of the virus, we expect to need additional food and funding in TEFAP. The investment of \$600 million in TEFAP food and \$250 million in TEFAP storage and distribution will not be enough to meet the demand. Therefore, we request an additional \$500 million for future food needs. We are also supportive of USDA market support purchases, but in some cases, these foods may be difficult for food banks to distribute using no-touch distribution models. Therefore, we request \$500 million in additional funding for TEFAP storage and distribution to assist with costs, including those incurred when distributing USDA market support purchases and disaster household food distribution programs.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kate Leone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kate Leone
Chief Government Relations Officer
Feeding America