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United States Senate

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400

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May 15, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

The effects of COVID-19 pose a significant threat to the food security of low income older Americans. Older adults who cannot safely leave their home to travel to the store should not be disadvantaged or go without access to healthy foods. The Commodity Supplemental Food Program, or senior food box program, helps to address the need, but improvements to program administration should be made in order to respond to the current pandemic. We urge USDA to standardize contactless distribution as well as to allow for additional supplemental foods to be included in a senior food box during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Food insecure older adults must often take desperate measure to stretch their limited budgets, from buying low-cost or low-nutrient foods to forgoing medications. The senior food box program provides over 700,000 low-income adults age 60 and up each year with monthly shelf-stable, nutrient rich foods. Through the buying power of the Federal government, foods can be purchased at wholesale prices for distribution to eligible seniors.

USDA should provide flexibilities to all distribution locations in order to ensure seniors can receive a box of food without significant health risk. For example, most states have implemented options that allow for contactless distribution. USDA should make clear in guidance to states that waiving the requirement of a signature at the point of distribution should be implemented during this pandemic. Similarly, USDA has the authority to increase the Maximum Monthly Distribution Rate to supplement the typical quantity of food in a monthly box and ensure that low-income seniors have access to an increased quantity of shelf-stable foods. This should be taking place across the country in order to limit the number of times a senior must leave the home in order to access proper nutrition.

In a time when many seniors are unable to safely leave their homes, all reasonable steps must be taken in order to eliminate barriers to accessing nutritious foods. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you to meet the nutritional needs of older Americans.

Sincerely,

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Ranking Member

Susan M. Collins
Chairman