April 8, 2020

The Honorable George Ervin “Sonny” Perdue III
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Given the unprecedented circumstances facing the people of our nation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to immediately implement nationwide expansion of the Online Purchasing Pilot for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as well as to include more retailers in the program.

The move toward accommodating online purchases for SNAP benefits has a long history of bipartisan support that began in the 2014 Farm Bill. More recently, the 2018 Farm Bill required a faster path toward scaling the pilot nationwide. The first phase of the pilot, which started in 2019, includes eight states and eight retailers.

One of the first studies to highlight the potential for expanded food security by online SNAP purchases was published late last year by researchers at Yale University and Tufts University. This study found that, in states participating in the Online Purchasing Pilot, 90 percent of people living in food deserts could receive grocery delivery to their homes.

As federal, state, and local governments expand social distancing measures to reduce transmissions of COVID-19, online purchases of food have become increasingly common to reduce public gathering in grocery stores. This is a critical need for many Americans, especially senior citizens who cannot leave their homes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises that older adults, 65 and older, are at a higher risk for severe illness for COVID-19; this age group accounts for 8 out of 10 COVID-19 deaths reported in the U.S. In this same

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demographic, we find high rates of hunger across our country as nearly 5.5 million seniors in 2017 reported to be food insecure.\(^2\)

SNAP, formerly known as the food stamp program, has been our nation’s foremost and most effective anti-hunger program for decades. Recent estimates reveal SNAP recipients are among our nation’s most vulnerable — nearly 20 million are children, about 11 million are people with disabilities, and almost 5 million are low-income seniors.

During this time, it is crucial that we keep SNAP working for those who need it most. Therefore, we again urge you to immediately expand the Online Purchasing Pilot to all states and additional retailers.

Sincerely,

ROSA L. DeLAURO
Member of Congress

ALAN LOWENTHAL
Member of Congress

JAN SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress

CONOR LAMB
Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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