



CITY OF BOSTON • MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
MARTIN J. WALSH

August 12, 2020

Dear Members of the Massachusetts Congressional Delegation,

On behalf of the more than 53,000 school children of Boston, Massachusetts and our families and communities, I thank you for your ongoing efforts to support school nutrition and expand food access in Boston and across the Commonwealth.

After we closed the schools to protect public health in mid-March, the City of Boston rallied to help our families. We created a system to distribute meals at sites all across the city, and delivered meals to students with Individualized Education Program (IEP) and who are homeless. We worked to provide students and families with a sense of security in an uncertain climate. I am incredibly grateful to our staff who have continued working to combat childhood hunger during the pandemic, so that our students are nourished and ready to learn. We appreciate that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provided regulatory flexibility for school meal programs this past school year. Unfortunately, the waivers USDA issued on June 25, while helpful, are insufficient to address the ongoing difficulties that our families are experiencing.

As of today:

- The number of individuals receiving SNAP in Massachusetts has grown 20% since February, with 911,862 individual recipients in June
- Almost 40,000 Massachusetts households lost their SNAP benefits in May and June due to income including Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (PUC) which is scheduled to end
- The unemployment rate in Massachusetts reached 17.4% in June, the highest in the country
- One in five Massachusetts families with children reported that they do not have enough food to feed their families
- Seven in every 10 Boston students are living at or below the poverty level

I appreciate the USDA's work to issue critical waivers to allow school meal programs to safely continue. However, the current waivers granted to the entirety of Massachusetts will expire on August 31st. If this waiver is not extended, access to nutritious meals will be compromised and this will have devastating consequences.

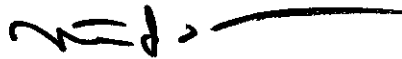
Families in need have received school meals at no charge since March and rely on this continued benefit as they struggle financially in this time of record unemployment.

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Additionally, as our hardworking school staff navigate what learning looks like for our students this fall, we must ensure that reliable and equitable access to nutritious food is a guarantee for every child. There is already too much stigma associated with accepting support with food access. At a time when families are struggling to make ends meet, we should strive to make it easier, not harder, for them to feed their children.

I respectfully request that you support the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in seeking a statewide waiver from the USDA to support our students. I appreciate your consideration of this crucial action to aid our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Walsh', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Martin J. Walsh  
Mayor of Boston

CC:

Senator Elizabeth Warren  
Senator Edward Markey