

Duckworth Blasts USDA Student Meal Decision that Will Add Significant Burdens to Already Strained School Districts in the Middle of the COVID-19 Pande

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WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) released the following statement after the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced it would not continue flexibilities for school districts for food insecure students, increasing administrative and cost burdens on school districts already strained due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Current flexibilities and waivers originally included in the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* have been a lifeline for schools, students and families who rely on these meals.

“After my father lost his job when I was a teenager, food stamps and reduced price meals at school kept me from going hungry. I am outraged that in the middle of a public health crisis, when so many Americans have lost their jobs and food insecurity has skyrocketed across the nation, the Trump Administration is making it harder for schools to provide healthy meals to children and families who need it the most. Because Donald

Trump and congressional Republicans have grossly mishandled the COVID-19 pandemic, we're approaching a new school year where Americans—including thousands of Illinoisans—will be relying on virtual learning to keep their families and communities safe.

We have long known that hunger affects learning and school performance and this short-sighted action will force many school districts to redirect limited local resources to fill this unnecessary nutrition gap. The USDA should immediately reverse its decision and instead, provide schools with certainty so they can continue providing students healthy meals during these unprecedented times.”

Duckworth has long advocated for hunger assistance, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and, in July, she [introduced](#) the *Expanding SNAP Options Act* that would address hunger needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond by requiring the USDA to expand online SNAP purchasing choices by enabling additional retailers to participate in the program. In the *HEROES Act*, she [successfully worked](#) to include provisions that would extend the Pandemic EBT program for families with children who would have otherwise received free or reduced price meals in school, through the summer and until schools reopen.