

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As Congress works through multiple phases of aid to help our fellow Americans in this unprecedented time, I want to applaud both the expedient work of Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCS) and the States tasked with implementing myriad flexibilities associated with COVID-19. These flexibilities allow States to work closely with their impacted communities in easing requirements of program participation.

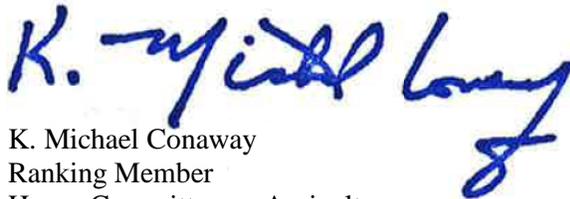
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) serves a wide variety of individuals, both young and old. It serves veterans. It serves the disabled. It serves individuals, couples, and large families alike. The needs of these populations are wide-ranging and require various programmatic adaptations to meet those needs, particularly in a time of crisis. And those needs are met through one of the most successful public-private partnerships: State agencies and retailers.

That being said, I urge you to explore additional flexibilities to make certain SNAP recipients are offered sustainable solutions to any access issues they may be experiencing across States. As an example, in 2014, the Farm Bill mandated a pilot be conducted to test the feasibility and implications of allowing retailers to accept SNAP benefits through online transactions. As you know, this was no small undertaking, and five years after the signing of the 2014 Farm Bill, the first pilot was implemented in the State of New York. I am pleased to see that six States - Alabama, New York, Washington, Oregon, Alabama and Iowa – are operating these pilots.

On March 10, 2020, on a call with FNCS political and career personnel, my staff inquired as to the likelihood of a nationwide expansion of these integral pilots. At the time, it was relayed that this was not viable. I ask that USDA reconsider this position. I ask this while recognizing—for the existing pilots—it took years to ensure these transactions had the same security and privacy as other types of tender. It is also evident that the requirements set forth by USDA require patience and collaboration between State agencies, processors, retailers, and consumers. But I believe it is a worthwhile effort given the gravity of the challenges facing our nation's most vulnerable citizens.

As this crisis continues to unfold and as Congress potentially considers additional rounds of legislation, I think calls to increase benefits remain premature when access is the more prevalent issue. I welcome your feedback and again thank your team for their tireless work.

Sincerely,



K. Michael Conaway
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture