September 25, 2020

The Honorable Robert Casey, Jr.

393 Russell Senate Office Building

United States Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) urges you to adopt the language included in House Resolution 8337 pertaining to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) waivers. As Congress deliberates the appropriate path for continuing the funding of the federal government and federally-funded programs, we believe these flexibilities, approved by a bipartisan majority (359 – 57) in the U.S. House of Representatives, will be necessary to support the provision of critical benefits to Pennsylvania households in need.

Under section 4603 of the resolution, there are three subsections which, if passed, would extend existing flexibilities DHS has found valuable in managing changing needs during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE). These flexibilities include:

* The ability to extend benefit certification periods and to adjust periodic reporting requirements;
* The ability to allow household reporting through periodic reporting; and
* The ability to adjust interview requirements.

The statutory extension of these waivers, granting the state the ability to implement them as needed, after reporting their use to the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, will ensure that states can continue to effectively manage the workload brought on by the COVID-19 PHE and its ensuing economic impact.

The economic impact of this crisis has not yet been fully mitigated and, for that reason, we expect SNAP enrollment to continue to grow. The continuation of these flexibilities would come at a crucial time. The Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation has ended, which was making many households income ineligible for SNAP. Fall is traditionally the period of open enrollment on the health insurance exchange and the beginning of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) season. When paired with the increased need for nutritional assistance as a result of the Public Health Emergency, DHS expects to be up to 30% over capacity in its benefit processing offices. This will delay state responsiveness at a time of great need. It is likely it will also further stress the charitable food network, which often plays an important intermediary role as households await SNAP eligibility determinations.

Pennsylvania, along with all states, face diminished revenue as a result of COVID-19. This will create significant budget shortfalls. Without the continuation of these flexibilities, DHS may need to dedicate additional precious resources for the authorization of overtime or to hire additional staff to keep pace with existing work.

For the benefit of the Commonwealth and its residents alike, we urge you to support the adoption and extension of these waiver flexibilities. On behalf of our shared constituents, we thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Teresa D. Miller

Secretary of the Department of Human Services