April 21, 2020

Secretary Teresa Miller  
Pennsylvania Department of Human Services  
625 Forster Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Secretary Miller,

Re: Safe Food Purchasing Options for SNAP Recipients

As legislators, we understand the economic precariousness of our constituents since the onset of the COVID-19 outbreaks and that it has increased the need for people to access the SNAP benefits program to ensure food security. We understand the need for SNAP recipients to have safe access to groceries which would include access to online grocery shopping and delivery services. More than one-third of SNAP households include a family member who is an older adult or someone with a disability and many of these families rely on ride-sharing or public transportation options to go grocery shopping. Leaving their homes to make in-person payments or even using neighborhood volunteer-based buddy systems further increases the risk of contracting COVID-19 for an already at-risk population.

We support DHS in submitting a waiver that allows SNAP benefit users to complete online grocery orders (and allow for home delivery service) so that they may adhere to the COVID-19 response guidelines outlined by the state government.

This waiver will be a good start to supporting our most vulnerable population. Additionally, we encourage you to look ahead to broadening the options and abilities for using and accepting SNAP benefits. From across the Commonwealth, we hear concerns about the safety and security of local food growers and producers who keep our food supply safe and steady and the financial security of these industries that are considered essential. Many local farms and producers have relied on sales to schools and restaurants and are now relying very heavily on direct-to-customer sales. As the increased demand for SNAP benefits drives users to shop at national chain retailers that can afford the large initial investment in the EBT system, smaller locally owned stores are losing customers. By expeditiously expanding the grocery retailers who can accept SNAP payments to include locally-owned grocers, local farmers and producers, and farmers’ markets and farm stands, we can provide a robust network of options for SNAP benefits users and at the same time bolster our local economies to ensure their longevities.
We know that addressing these serious challenges requires cooperation across departments. We are asking you to:

1. Promote the use and availability of mobile EBT processing equipment so payment can be accepted on delivery or curb-side pickup. Retailers should be encouraged to acquire mobile EBT processing equipment to accept payment upon pickup or delivery. This should be included in recommendations for life-sustaining retailers to promote social distancing.
2. Expedite soliciting requests and approving grants that provide mobile EBT equipment to farmers markets and farm stands.
3. Support legislative efforts to help off-set delivery costs and help facilitate these reimbursements to vendors if passed. Because SNAP benefits cannot pay for delivery fees and because SNAP households are often too low-income to afford delivery fees, retailers should be reimbursed for delivery costs to SNAP households.
4. Submit an application to USDA to join the online SNAP Purchasing Pilot promptly so that retailers who can offer this service do so as soon as possible. The application should also state that:
   a. DHS will develop a transparent option for retailers or groups of retailers who share an online purchasing platform to be able to join the pilot in the future.
   b. DHS plans to work with the PA Department of Agriculture to help facilitate a shared online purchasing platform for PA producers and growers to accept EBT payments online.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests and your service at this challenging time.

Sincerely,

Sara Innamorato  
State Representative  
21st Legislative District

Dan Miller  
State Representative  
42nd Legislative District

Dan B. Frankel  
State Representative  
23rd Legislative District

Joanna E. McClinton  
House Democratic Caucus Chair  
191st Legislative District

Melissa Shusterman  
State Representative  
157th Legislative District

Austin Davis  
State Representative  
35th Legislative District

Jordan Harris  
House Democratic Whip  
186th Legislative District

Ed Gainey  
State Representative  
24th Legislative District

Joseph Hohenstein  
State Representative  
177th Legislative District
Kyle Mullins  
State Representative  
112th Legislative District

Mike Schlossberg  
State Representative  
132nd Legislative District

Stephen Kinsey  
State Representative  
201st Legislative District

Margo L. Davidson  
State Representative  
164th Legislative District

Jared Solomon  
State Representative  
202nd Legislative District

Harry Readshaw  
State Representative  
36th Legislative District

Danielle Friel Otten  
State Representative  
155th Legislative District

Steven Malagari  
State Representative  
53rd Legislative District

Adam Ravenstahl  
State Representative  
20th Legislative District

Mike McCarter  
State Representative  
154th Legislative District

Ben Sanchez  
State Representative  
153rd Legislative District

Mike Zabel  
State Representative  
163rd Legislative District

Mark Rozzi  
State Representative  
126th Legislative District

Tim Briggs  
State Representative  
149th Legislative District

Jennifer O’Mara  
State Representative  
165th Legislative District

Danilo Burgos  
State Representative  
197th Legislative District

Matthew Bradford  
House Democratic Appropriations Chair  
70th Legislative District

Mike Sturla  
House Democratic Policy Chair  
96th Legislative District

William C. Kortz  
State Representative  
38th Legislative District

John Galloway  
State Representative  
140th Legislative District

James Roebuck  
State Representative  
188th Legislative District

Mary Louise Isaacson  
State Representative  
175th Legislative District

Dan K. Williams  
State Representative  
74th Legislative District

Maria Donatucci  
State Representative  
185th Legislative District
Carol Hill-Evans  
State Representative  
95th Legislative District

Christopher M. Rabb  
State Representative  
200th Legislative District

Jason Ortitay  
State Representative  
46th Legislative District

Thomas R. Caltagirone  
State Representative  
127th Legislative District

Morgan Cephas  
State Representative  
192nd Legislative District

Patty Kim  
State Representative  
103rd Legislative District

G. Roni Green  
State Representative  
190th Legislative District

Malcolm Kenyatta  
State Representative  
181st Legislative District

Christina Sappey  
State Representative  
158th Legislative District

Maureen Madden  
State Representative  
115th Legislative District

Wendy Ullman  
State Representative  
143rd Legislative District

Liz Hanbidge  
State Representative  
61st Legislative District

Elizabeth Fiedler  
State Representative  
184th Legislative District

Carolyn Comitta  
State Representative  
156th Legislative District

Dan Deasy  
State Representative  
27th Legislative District