

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 31, 2023

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Heinrich and Ranking Member Hoeven:

As the subcommittee develops its upcoming Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Appropriations legislation, we respectfully request your consideration of the needs of our nation's network of food banks and other emergency food providers. Many of these providers are struggling to meet sustained high levels of demand while facing increased costs for purchasing, storing, and transporting food. In the face of these challenges, we urge you to provide the full authorized level of \$100 million for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) Storage and Distribution. As you are aware, the President's FY 2024 budget request includes full funding for TEFAP Storage and Distribution. We also ask you to continue to provide at least the authorized funding level for TEFAP mandatory commodities.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a federal food distribution program that supports food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other emergency feeding organizations that serve low income Americans. This support, in the form of federally purchased commodities, including fruits, vegetables, meats, and grains, is essential for addressing hunger across the country. TEFAP Storage and Distribution funding is vital in assisting food banks and emergency feeding agencies cope with the rising costs of storage, transportation, and distribution of foods to people who need it most.

The following factors have been placing strong pressures on the nation's emergency food assistance system:

- According to USDA's 2022 *Household Food Insecurity in the United States* report, 33.8 million people lived in food-insecure households during 2021, including 9.3 million children.
- Demand for emergency food remains above pre-pandemic levels in communities all across America. Over the last year, the end of COVID recovery funding, the impact of inflation, coupled with a decline in donations, has left food banks with less food overall. Additionally, pandemic-era SNAP emergency allotments have come to an end

nationwide starting in March 2023. The expiration of this aid will result in the reduction of SNAP benefits by at least \$95 per household per month according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

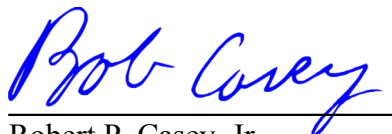
- When TEFAP Storage and Distribution funds fall short of what is needed to cover distribution costs, food banks must often use donated funds to cover the difference. This diverts funds from other programs and services provided by the food bank that could be used to support clients in need. In addition to preventing potentially millions of meals from being delivered to those in need, the chronic underfunding of TEFAP Storage and Distribution delays much-needed capital investments and leaves charitable food organizations with inadequate numbers of often aging, unreliable, and inefficient delivery vehicles and cold storage equipment. The TEFAP Reach and Resiliency Grants announced by USDA in FY 2022 were a start in addressing this underfunding.

To begin closing this gap, we also ask the committee to provide \$15 million to fully fund the Emergency Food Program Infrastructure Grant program, which Congress established in 2008 specifically to help emergency feeding organizations meet the needs outlined above. The authorized use of grant funds includes “capital, infrastructure, and operating costs associated with the collection, storage, distribution, and transportation of time-sensitive and perishable food products” as well as “constructing, expanding, or repairing a facility or equipment.”

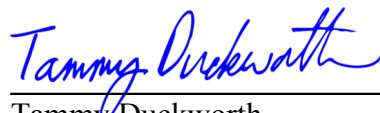
We are grateful for your leadership in providing funding for this account—including \$92 million in the FY 2023 spending bill. Providing full funding of \$100 million for TEFAP Storage and Distribution, in addition to providing at least full mandatory funding for TEFAP commodities, is critical if our emergency feeding agencies are to serve the growing numbers of people seeking assistance. Food banks want to invest in programs that help clients move towards self-sufficiency and independence, such as job training, and they cannot do so if they must continually make up for a shortfall in federal funds for TEFAP distribution. Lastly, we urge the Committee to work with the Secretary of Agriculture to identify opportunities for increasing the supply of TEFAP commodities in the coming fiscal year through bonus and specialty crop purchases.

We appreciate your consideration of our request for at least full funding for TEFAP commodities and for TEFAP Storage and Distribution funds. We look forward to working with you on these and other pressing issues before the Committee. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



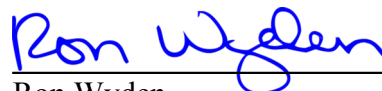
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Jack Reed
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
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Ron Wyden
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Cory A. Booker
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Debbie Stabenow
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Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



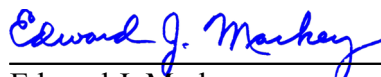
Peter Welch
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



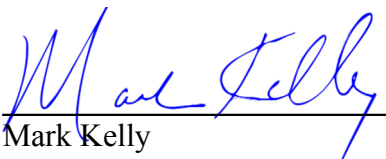
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator





Jon Ossoff
United States Senator




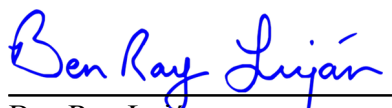
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

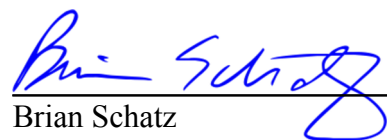

Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



John Fetterman
United States Senator

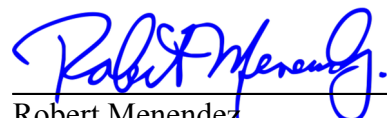

Ben Ray Lujan
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Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
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Tammy Baldwin
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Robert Menendez
United States Senator




Jon Tester
United States Senator



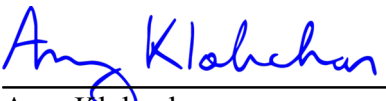
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



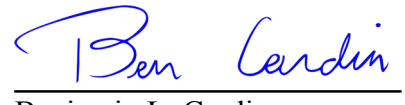
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United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator