



Food and
Nutrition
Service

Braddock
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Braddock
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Alexandria
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September 14, 2020

Lourdes N. García Santiago
Acting Director
State Agency, Food and Nutrition Services
PR Department of Education
P.O. Box 190759
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00919-0759

Dear Ms. Santiago:

This letter is in response to the Puerto Rico State Agency (PRDOE), September 9, 2020, request to waive the requirement that Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) foods may only be provided to students during non-congregate meal services due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Under current requirements, Program operators must provide FFVP foods directly to students.

Specifically, PRSA requested a statewide waiver of the distribution requirements at Section 19(b) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) (42 USC 1769a). As implemented, Section 19(b) requires Program operators to provide FFVP foods directly to students, not to parents and guardians. However, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) recognizes that in this public health emergency, continuing to require children to come to the meal site to pick up meals may not be practical and in keeping with the goal of providing meals while also taking appropriate safety measures.

Because the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127) did not include FFVP as a “qualified program,” the nationwide waiver allowing parents to pick up meals for children at non-congregate sites does not apply to FFVP. Therefore, State agencies must request a waiver under Section 12(l) of the NSLA to permit Program operators with an approved waiver allowing non-congregate meal distribution during COVID-19-related operations to distribute FFVP foods to a parent or guardian to take home to their children.

To grant a Section 12(l) waiver, the NSLA requires that the waiver must facilitate the purpose of the program, the public must receive notice and information regarding the proposed waiver, and the waiver will not increase the overall cost of the program to the Federal Government. FNS finds that PRDOE’s waiver request satisfies these statutory requirements.

Accordingly, based on the exceptional circumstances relating to the continued public health emergency due to COVID-19, and pursuant to the waiver authority granted at section 12(l) of the NSLA, FNS approves PRDOE’s waiver request through June 30, 2021.

Therefore, effective immediately, for SY-2020-2021, this waiver allows State agencies to approve school food authorities (SFAs) participating in FFVP to distribute FFVP foods to a parent or guardian to take home to their children. SFAs may begin distributing FFVP foods when classes officially begin.

State agencies, in addition to meeting the NSLA requirements for a Section 12(l) waiver listed above, must have a plan for ensuring that Program operators are able to maintain accountability and program integrity. This includes putting in place processes to ensure that FFVP foods are distributed only to parents or guardians of eligible children, and that duplicate meals are not distributed to any child. State agencies may want to consult local Program operators when developing their plans as local Program operators are best situated to determine how to provide these assurances. If PRDOE has already developed a plan for distribution to parents and guardians through other programs, that plan may be adapted to include FFVP.

The waiver authority at section 12(l) of the NSLA also requires FNS to periodically review the performance of any State or eligible service provider that was granted a waiver. Therefore, PRDOE must provide to the FNS Mid-Atlantic Regional Office a written report quantifying the impact of the waiver, as described below.

The report must include the following:

- A description of how the waiver impacted FFVP food service operations, children's access to FFVP foods, and participation in FFVP;
- The number of FFVP schools that used the waiver;
- The FFVP funds provided during the SY 2020-2021 COVID-19-related operations, demonstrating that the waiver has not resulted in an increase to the overall cost of the program; and
- A summary of findings associated with the waiver

FNS appreciates PRDOE's commitment to work with SFAs to meet the nutritional needs of children during a challenging time. If you have questions, please contact the FNS Mid-Atlantic Regional Office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Angela M. Kline". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Angela M. Kline
Director
Policy and Program Development Division

Electronic Copy: Michelle Frey, MARO