

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 29, 2018

George Ervin "Sonny" Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

Children in thousands of communities across our nation rely on nutritious meals provided through the National School Lunch Program. This program has proven to be a vital source of nutrition to support young minds and bodies for learning. To ensure that every child in every community has access to the food they need, we request you provide the necessary resources to issue kosher and halal food codes for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) ordering system in advance of the next school year.

Every school day, more than 100,000 students require access to kosher and halal meals through the NSLP. In an effort to meet the religious dietary restrictions of their students, some schools seek to use their NSLP entitlement to purchase appropriate kosher or halal food items. The schools for which this is most important often require a kosher standard that is different from the conventional level of kosher. Currently, very few foods, and only one protein rich food, have codes that reflect this designation and consequently, the schools cannot use the entirety of their NSLP allocation. This results in \$2 million in important nutrition that does not make it onto the lunch trays of children every year. There is a strong demand that kosher and halal proteins, including tuna, frozen chicken, canned salmon, ground turkey, mozzarella cheese, and yogurt, be added to the commodities list. The higher relative cost of proteins makes it imperative that school nutrition professionals have codes that facilitate the ordering of appropriate foods.

In the five boroughs of New York City alone, there are 507,000 people living in poor or near-poor Jewish households. More than 180,000 Jewish children, nearly 45 percent of all Jewish children in New York City, live in poor or near-poor households. Due to this level of food insecurity, many Jewish children rely on NSLP to provide them with important, appropriate foods while in school. I thank you and the staff of USDA for previous efforts to provide culturally appropriate meals for our students and appreciate your prompt response to this request.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate



Jerrold Nadler
United States House of Representatives