

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 1, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
H-204, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As the Senate anticipates consideration of a fourth supplemental appropriations package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we respectfully request that \$300 million in additional emergency appropriations be directed to the ESSA Title I, Part C Migrant Education Program and \$350 million be directed to the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Program. Migrant children and families are under tremendous strain as this coronavirus pandemic continues to have an inequitable impact on families' health, education, and economic stability. This additional relief would equip the Migrant Education Program and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Program to cover the additional costs associated with safely resuming services for migrant families and to meet the added needs caused by COVID-19.

The agricultural sector, which depends on migrant farmworkers, contributes over \$1 trillion to the U.S. economy.<sup>1</sup> Over 300,000 children relocate across the country multiple times each year, as their families pursue seasonal work in the nation's fruit, vegetable, dairy, tobacco, meatpacking, and fishing industries.<sup>2</sup> Thousands of blueberry pickers, for example, start their season in Florida, and travel to Georgia, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Michigan over the course of the year. Having to change schools so frequently presents profound challenges for the children of migrant farmworkers, who experience frequent disruptions to their learning and must

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Ag and Food Sectors and the Economy," May 4, 2020, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/ag-and-food-sectors-and-the-economy/>.

<sup>2</sup> Pacific Standard, "The Young Hands that Feed Us," Karen Coates and Valeria Fernández, July 9, 2019, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/the-young-hands-that-feed-us>.

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adjust to new classes, new teachers, and new peers with every move.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education estimated that just half of migrant children graduate from high school.<sup>4</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic is compounding the hardships that the children of migrant farmworkers face, as the public institutions migrant families usually rely on, including schools, Head Start centers, and afterschool programs, remain shuttered. Deemed “essential workers,” migrant families rarely have access to paid family leave.<sup>5</sup> Migrant farmworkers are thereby forced to choose between staying home, and likely lose their job for doing so, leaving their children at home without adult supervision, or bringing them to work, which would expose minors to pesticides and other hazardous conditions.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, migrant children of all ages are under tremendous pressure to work alongside their families in the fields, provide child care to siblings, and often lack access to the internet or connected devices.<sup>7</sup> Migrant children already have significant academic, social, and emotional needs that will compound their learning loss due to school closures.<sup>8</sup>

Founded in 1966, the Title I, Part C Migrant Education Program (MEP) funds state and community-based programs that identify eligible migrant children and provide education and support services to them.<sup>9</sup> In 2016-17, the Migrant Education Program served nearly 220,000 migrant children, from age 3 through 21.<sup>10</sup> MEP funding was directed to 47 states in FY 2015, with the largest allocations going to California, Texas, Washington, Kansas, and Oregon.<sup>11</sup> With schools closed, Migrant Education Programs have experienced increased demand for their services. At the same time, the safeguards needed to safely educate children, including purchasing personal protective equipment and implementing smaller class sizes, makes doing so even more expensive.

The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) Program was founded in 1969 and provides critical child care, medical, dental, instructional, and nutritional services to nearly 30,000

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<sup>3</sup> Education Week, “Education, Unsettled,” Alex Granados, November 28, 2018, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/projects/education-unsettled-migrant-students.html>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education, “Migrant Education Secondary Student Initiative,” September 11, 2015, <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/secondarystudent.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Center for American Progress, “Protecting Farmworkers From Coronavirus and Securing the Food Supply,” Zoe Willingham and Silva Mathema, April 23, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2020/04/23/483488/protecting-farmworkers-coronavirus-securing-food-supply/>.

<sup>6</sup> League of United Latin American Citizens, “Statement on COVID-19 and the Risks to Farmworkers,” March 20, 2020, [https://lulac.org/covid19/advocacy/Covid19\\_Farmworker\\_Advocates\\_Statement.pdf](https://lulac.org/covid19/advocacy/Covid19_Farmworker_Advocates_Statement.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Effective Partnerships Guide: Improving Oral Health for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Children and their Families,” 2018, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/effective-partnerships-guide-oral-health-mshs-v3.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Education, “Migrant Education--Basic State Formula Grants,” June 18, 2019, <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/mep/index.html>; American Public Media, “The Children in the Fields,” Tennessee Watson, August 14, 2019, <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2019/08/14/the-children-in-the-fields>.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Education, “Migrant Education Program,” <https://results.ed.gov/>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Education, “FY 2015 MEP Allocations,” <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/mep/fy15mep.pdf>.

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migrant children up to age 5.<sup>12</sup> Over 60 MSHS programs operate in 38 states, and are open for more hours each day than most other Head Start programs to accommodate the longer workdays of farmworker parents.<sup>13</sup> COVID-19 has forced over 90 percent of Head Start programs nationwide to temporarily close, including nearly all MSHS programs.<sup>14</sup>

To address the urgent and widespread challenges faced by the children of migrant farmworkers during the COVID-19 crisis, we urge you to appropriate an additional \$300 million for the ESSA Title I, Part C Migrant Education Program and \$350 million for the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Program in the next COVID-19 supplemental package. State and community-based migrant education programs would immediately use emergency funds to:

- Provide health, hygiene, and counseling services and other social-emotional supports to migrant children, whose family members are at heightened risk of contracting COVID-19 and falling ill from the virus;<sup>15</sup>
- Secure personal protective equipment and sanitizing supplies for MEP and MSHS facilities to comply with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local public health authorities' guidelines;
- Hire additional teaching and support staff necessary to continue providing services to qualified children while complying with CDC guidelines, including social distancing guidelines;
- Purchase technology to enable distance learning, including laptops and internet hotspots, and cover costs associated with instructional software, training and support to ensure that migrant children and families can access virtual classrooms and other learning opportunities;
- Operate virtual and in-person learning centers and migrant summer school for school-aged children whose schools are closed due to COVID-19; and
- Transport the children of migrant farmworkers, in compliance with CDC social distancing guidelines, to MEP and MSHS facilities.

The security of our nation's food supply hinges on migrant farmworkers. Yet none of the COVID-19 relief packages that Congress has passed so far this year have included funding specifically supporting the children of migrant farmworkers. As harvesting season is underway in much of the country, and as increasing reports emerge of COVID-19 outbreaks at farm and meat processing facilities, there is an urgent need to strengthen public supports for migrant children.<sup>16</sup> Supplemental funding for the ESSA Title I, Part C Migrant Education Program and

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<sup>12</sup> The Counter, "Who Takes Care of Farmworkers' Children?" Rolando Zenteno, April 21, 2020, <https://thecounter.org/farmworkers-children-undocumented-school-covid-19-coronavirus/>.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>14</sup> New America, "When Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Programs Close, Who Cares for Farmworkers' Children?" Elise Franchino, May 7, 2020, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/when-migrant-and-seasonal-head-start-programs-close-who-cares-farmworkers-children/>.

<sup>15</sup> Center for American Progress.

<sup>16</sup> Politico, "Trump deems farmworkers 'essential' but not safety rules for them. That could threaten the food supply," Helena Bottemiller Evich and Liz Crampton, May 12, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/12/trump-farmworkers-essential-coronavirus-safety-250142>.

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the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Program would leverage existing programs to meet this pressing demand.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you to ensure that all of our nation's students, particularly migrant children, have the resources they need to continue to be successful.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Donald Norcross  
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



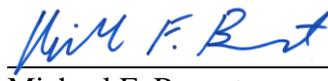
Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich

Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator

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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



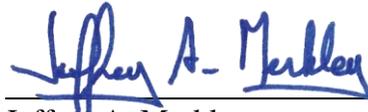
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Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



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Tom Udall  
United States Senator



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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

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/s/ Juan Vargas

Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress

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/s/ Sylvia R. Garcia

Sylvia R. Garcia  
Member of Congress

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/s/ Joaquin Castro

Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress

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/s/ Sheila Jackson Lee

Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress

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/s/ James P. McGovern

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress