Dear Members of the Tennessee Congressional Delegation,

The Education Trust in Tennessee, along with our state partners, are grateful for the leadership that you have provided in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. As this virus continues to impact our state, a pressing and urgent issue remains at the forefront for our communities: hunger and food insecurity.

Prior to the start of COVID-19, over 260,000 Tennessee children—one is seven children—struggled with hunger. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 outbreak has caused that number to rapidly increase. Now one in every four Tennessee children is at risk of food insecurity. Food insecurity for children and youth of all ages is intolerable – and it is avoidable.

Investments made in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201) have gone a long way to prevent hunger, but they are not enough given new and emerging data on the current status of food insecurity for children, especially for children of color, across the country.

The issue of food insecurity is particularly dire for Tennessee children who are eligible for the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer program (P-EBT) created in H.R. 6201. Recent reports that Tennessee may forgo $60 million dollars of federal food assistance because the state has failed to implement the P-EBT program with fidelity by conducting the necessary data matching and information gathering, as well as outreach and advocacy alongside schools and districts across the state threatens the very livelihoods of Tennessee children and their families.

As the undersigned organizations, we believe that federal and state leaders must do more in this moment of great need to increase access, availability, and flexibility of food assistance aid and programs. As Congress negotiates the fourth COVID-19 relief bill, we encourage lawmakers to do more to curb food insecurity for Tennessee students and families by:

- Extending the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program through summer 2020 and into the next academic year to allow households with children receiving free or reduced-price school meals to access food purchasing dollars if the child’s school has been closed for more than five consecutive days or if the school is operating with a hybrid or virtual model of instruction;
- Expanding P-EBT benefits for children under 5 years old;
- Ensuring no more laws are needed to extend the program should school closures or distance learning continue;
- Strengthening the program by supporting states and directing the USDA to work with state agencies to administer benefits quickly;
• Increasing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) maximum monthly allotment by 15%;
• Raising the minimum monthly SNAP benefit from $16 to $30;
• Suspending administrative actions that would eliminate or weaken SNAP benefits or participation, including the Trump administration’s changes to categorical eligibility;
• Eliminating work requirements that bar college students from accessing critical SNAP benefits;
• Providing increased funding dedicated to outreach so more eligible families can receive SNAP, WIC, and other food aid; and

Thank you again for your leadership during this public health crisis. As Tennessee children begin the next school year (whether virtually, in-person, or some combination), it is paramount that they receive the critical nutritional supports which bolster retention, provide energy, and build a foundation for academic growth and success during this unprecedented time.

We would be happy to answer any questions about these priorities and would appreciate the opportunity to work with your staff on these issues.

Sincerely,

Ruby Aguilar
Student
Lipscomb University

Duretti Ahmad
Student
Vanderbilt University

Tracey Alderdice
Senior Director Agency & Program Services
Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee

Brooke Allen
Founding Director
Diverse Learners Cooperative

Christopher Banos
Student
Cumberland University

KaMya Burrell
Student
University of Tennessee- Chattanooga

Claudia Caballero
President & CEO
Centro Hispano de East Tennessee

Katie Cour
President & CEO
Nashville Public Education Foundation

Tosha Downey
Director of Advocacy
Memphis Education Fund

Judy Freudenthal
VP Youth Engagement & Action
Oasis Center

Khadesha Gordon
Student
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga

Timothy Green
Co-Founder
Memphis Restorative Justice Coalition
Betsy Bonilla Jimenez Hurst  
Executive Director  
HOLA Lakeway – Morristown

Erin O’Hara  
Executive Director  
Tennessee Education Research Alliance

Nancy Keil  
President & CEO  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee

Gini Pupo-Walker  
State Director for Tennessee  
The Education Trust

Mary Falls  
Senior Advisor to the Mayor  
Nashville

Peter Tang  
Community Member  
Nashville

Brenda Haywood  
Deputy Mayor of Community Engagement  
Nashville

Walton Robinson  
Interim Executive Director  
UnifiEd

Candy Johnson  
Senior Advisor to the Mayor  
City of Chattanooga

Lisa Sherman-Nikolaus  
Policy Director  
Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition

Stacy Lightfoot  
Vice President  
Public Education Foundation, Chattanooga

Renee Pratt  
Executive Director of Metropolitan Social Services  
Nashville

Alison McArthur  
Community Achieves  
Metro Nashville Public Schools

Stephanie Styll  
Director of Partnerships  
Hands on Nashville

Lisa McCrady  
Special Assistant to the Executive Director  
Metro Action Commission- Nashville

Gloria Sweet-Love  
President & Director  
Tennessee- NAACP

Natalie McKinney  
Executive Director and Co-Founder  
Whole Child Strategies, Inc.- Memphis

Kaleb Sy  
Student  
East T-STEM Academy High School

Kimberly Molnar  
Chief Operations Officer  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee

Marcos Villa  
Academic & Development Director  
Intercultural Research Center

Phyllis Nichols  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
Knoxville Area Urban League

Laura Ward  
Senior Vice President, Talent Development  
Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce

Jennifer Novo  
Executive Director  
FUTURO, Inc.
Tom Ward  
President & CEO  
Oasis Center

Carol Westlake  
Executive Director  
Tennessee Disability Coalition

CC: Senator Lamar Alexander; Senator Marsha Blackburn; Representative Phil Roe; Representative Tim Burchett; Representative Chuck Fleischmann; Representative Scott DesJarlais; Representative Jim Cooper; Representative John Rose; Representative Mark E. Green; Representative David Kustoff; Representative Steve Cohen