

Cosign a Letter Supporting Kosher and Halal Access in The Emergency Food Assistance Program

Sending Office: Honorable Grace Meng
Sent By: Judith.Teruya@mail.house.gov

Support Kosher and Halal Access in The Emergency Food Assistance Program

Cosigners: Reps. Auchincloss, Carson, Davis (IL), Espaillat, Evans, Hayes, C. Maloney, Nadler, Suozzi, Pingree, Pressley, and Velazquez.

Endorsing Organizations: *ICNA Relief, Met Council on Jewish Poverty, ICNA Council for Social Justice, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, Alliance to End Hunger, Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), National WIC Association, Food Bank for New York City, Agudath Israel of America, Masbia Soup Kitchen Network, RESULTS, Jewish Women International, Islamic Relief, American Halal Institute, Northern California Islamic Council, Givn Brands, United States Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO), Poligon Education Fund, Shura Council of Southern California, Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies (NJHSA), Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, and Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC).*

Dear Colleague,

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) has been essential in helping food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other emergency feeding organizations to address the millions of people facing food insecurity across our nation. It is essential that these feeding programs remain accessible to all Americans who need them, especially individuals with specific dietary requirements connected to religious and cultural practices.

I am concerned over the limited kosher protein and non-existent halal and kosher meat options available through TEFAP. Kosher and halal meat options are sold nationally, yet TEFAP does not include these kosher and halal meat options which means kosher and halal distributors are not able to utilize all the meat and protein products in their TEFAP allotments. Our federal feeding programs need to be equitable and accessible to all clientele.

Please join me in requesting that Secretary Vilsack updates USDA's plans to incorporate more kosher and halal food in TEFAP and encouraging USDA to seek input from Muslim and Jewish communities on culturally and religiously sensitive dietary options. Deadline to sign this letter is COB on

Thursday August 26. To sign on to this letter or for questions, please contact Judith Teruya (judith.teruya@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,

Grace Meng, James P. McGovern, Ilhan Omar, and Ted Deutch.
Members of Congress

Letter Text:

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write to express concern over the limited kosher protein and non-existent halal and kosher meat options available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and inquire about the steps that the USDA will take to ensure that TEFAP provides ample culturally and religiously sensitive dietary options. As the United States continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, as many as 29 million Americans continue to face

food insecurity. The pandemic has exacerbated this problem and we are deeply concerned about the share of kosher and halal meat and other protein options available to the many observant individuals and families who utilize TEFAP. We believe that our federal feeding programs should be equitable and accessible for clientele who have culturally and religiously mandated dietary restrictions.

The United States is a melting pot of cultures, and as our country grows and diversifies, our social institutions must reflect that change. We believe you should provide a safety net for our communities, be they small business owners, essential workers, gig workers, or refugees, so that they too can access nutritious meals for their families. Kosher and halal meat options are sold nationally through large corporations and small farmers, yet there are no kosher and halal meat options available through TEFAP. Kosher and halal distributors may not be able to utilize certain meat or protein options in TEFAP allotments and are therefore not receiving the full value of their allotment. We believe it is important that USDA works to ensure equity in the quantities of kosher and halal protein alternatives made available so that these distributors are receiving the same value of food as non-kosher or halal distributors. We believe USDA should work with its counterparts in state agencies to gather input and feedback about successes and failures in emergency food service from community leaders involved in each level of TEFAP product distribution and the community members that they serve.

The USDA has risen to the occasion and provided additional support to Americans struggling with hunger during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of the disruptions to the nation's food supply chain. This need will continue over the next several years, justifying continued USDA food purchases in support of agriculture producers and improved nutrition security while being attentive to the cultural and religious needs of local communities.

We request an update on the USDA's plans to incorporate kosher and halal food in TEFAP, as well as the input that USDA receives from Jewish and Muslim communities on culturally and religiously sensitive dietary options. We look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible to learn how USDA intends to mitigate these concerns.

Sincerely,