



Dear Governor Justice,

Food For All is a broad and diverse coalition of individuals and organizations across West Virginia who believe no West Virginian should ever go without access to adequate, nutritious food.

The Food For All coalition has dedicated itself to improving food security outcomes for our friends and neighbors across the Mountain State through public policy. Today, we write you to shine a light on the troubling food security situation of West Virginia's most important group of people, our kids.

Closing West Virginia's public schools was the correct public health decision to help stem the spread of COVID-19 and flatten the curve in West Virginia. Since that time, there has been some cooperation between our communities, school service personnel, teachers, and others as they come together to provide as many meals to as many children as possible. Cabell and Calhoun Counties, for example, has shown outstanding leadership, cooperation, and communication from the top down.

The response to COVID-19 has exposed several institutional cracks in our food delivery systems, especially for over 200,000 West Virginian children who count on our public education system to receive breakfast, lunch, snacks, and in many cases, backpacks with food for evenings and weekends. Without school meals and backpack programs, our children go without food and as we begin the fourth week of school closures many kids are experiencing hunger pangs alongside the challenges being socially isolated. It is particularly painful to listen to reports of cash-strapped parents walking their children to the bus stop 15 minutes early to receive their meal, only to learn that the bus left past 10 minutes prior. These and other communications and logistics issues must be resolved quickly in order ensure that West Virginia's most vulnerable populations have access to *basic* human needs.

The Food For All coalition believes that only the explicit and firm leadership of West Virginia's Chief Executive can quickly remedy problems volunteers and parents have identified. Specifically, county-level responses have been extremely uneven across the state, public resources are not being leveraged to their full potential, and many counties lack cooperation between county-level leaders, volunteers, and community organizations dedicated to feeding children who could help with delivery of communication and resources. There is an opportunity for county-level leadership to collaborate with government and partners in order to make sure that every child has access to food during this crisis.

Your leadership is especially critical, not only because children are going hungry, but also because managing the massive influx of federal food assistance dollars about to come to West Virginia will require far more cooperation than is currently happening in order to be effective. To that end, the Food For All coalition recommends the following:

- Put out a statewide call to restaurants and smaller community entities to join the Governor's plan to feed children and seniors through privately-owned restaurants.
- Explicitly direct every county superintendent to publish concrete, publicly accessible plans detailing how school board employees will become the hub of feeding information and coordinate resources with the Office of Childhood Nutrition, local volunteers, food pantries, and local community organizations within counties to secure food for children throughout the duration of the pandemic and summer months.

**The following are recommendations for county-level feed plans:**

- Meal Preparation
  1. Utilize churches with commercial kitchens to prepare food and utilize classrooms/nurseries to pack food in order to observe social distancing measures and maintain less than 10 people in a space.
  2. Recruit student volunteers looking for community service hours to prepare food packages safely.
- Delivery
  1. Run full and complete regularly scheduled school bus routes to deliver meals. Routes should be prepared to serve each child on the route a meal.
  2. Develop logistically accurate and more flexible delivery times.
  3. Utilize social workers, counselors, and parent volunteers as neighborhood captains to help deliver to homes/neighborhoods, as McDowell county has done.
  4. Develop a waiver to allow city bus drivers to operate school buses.
  5. Instruct that each child under the age of 18 at each feeding site may access meals, regardless of which school (homeschool or otherwise) they attend.
  6. Partner with churches and car dealerships to use vans and vehicles to deliver food/meals.
- Receive Feedback for Improvement
  1. Organize teachers and school service personnel to conduct follow-up phone calls to see if meals were obtained and ask for feedback to improve delivery system.
  2. If the county is delivering multiple days' worth of meals just once per week, follow-up calls should ascertain whether families have appropriate freezer space, which may be particularly challenging for families with multiple children. Provide coolers and ice if applicable to transport food. For the families that do not have adequate freezer space, create an option(s) for the school admin/staff to hold the food for the families in school storage until needed.
- Community Cooperation and Communication

1. Recruit, train, and utilize community volunteers. Food For All coalition partners have established community volunteers and leaders across the state, but we need more. Community volunteers make contact with the parents/guardians, ask what they need, confirm address, and deliver resources. Given that finances and transportation continue to be obstacles for families.
2. Deliver excess food to community food pantries and organizations supplementing feeding, including non-official summer feeding sites for redistribution.
3. Each county must disseminate a resource list with each food pick-up location and include transportation resources if available in the county.

The Food For All coalition believes that strong and decisive leadership from you, Governor Justice, can quickly and decisively close the gaps for West Virginia’s children who are currently going hungry while laying the groundwork to maximize the federal food assistance dollars that will soon be here. Time is of the essence. We urge you to act quickly.



**American Friends  
Service Committee**

**FJL**

Food Justice Lab

