

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 26, 2024

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As Members of both chambers of Congress and leaders of the Committees and Subcommittees on Appropriations, we are alarmed to only recently have learned about the food shortage crisis that has been inflicted upon our nation's Tribes. We were made aware of this issue from Tribes across the country, who are now in a dire situation because of a failure to ensure food has been received by Tribes in a timely manner through the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). The program serves some of the most vulnerable people in our country, and recipients have reported bare shelves, having received expired food items, and inconsistent food deliveries for over four months. Tribes are deeply worried about when food will arrive and when USDA will resolve this situation. It is the federal government's responsibility to uphold its trust and treaty obligations to Tribes, and this situation must be resolved immediately. We have also been alerted to similar potential issues with the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). As you know, seniors rely on this supplemental food, and any delay is unacceptable.

To obtain the information we need to ensure this situation is resolved expeditiously, we seek answers to the following questions and ask for relevant documentation by September 9, 2024:

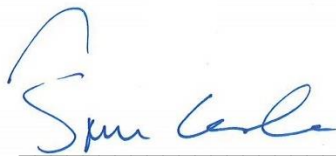
1. Please explain USDA's rationale to move from two contractors to one and provide all documentation associated with the transition from two contractors to one between July 1, 2023, and August 25, 2024, including any communication with Paris Brothers explaining they would be the sole vendor for the program.
2. Please provide a timeline of events from July 1, 2023, as USDA was beginning the process of soliciting bids through August 25, 2024, including the date USDA became aware of delayed food delivery; when USDA first communicated with Paris Brothers about issues with the FDPIR contract; when USDA communicated with Tribes and relevant stakeholders about the delays; actions taken by USDA to try to address the delays, etc.

3. Please provide all communications issued to States, program participants, and any other relevant stakeholders since the start of the delays.
4. When Tribes voiced concern and even opposition to moving to one contractor, why did USDA not consider their input?
5. Please explain why USDA has not approved options offered by Tribes to remedy this situation, such as driving their own trucks to pick up food from the Paris Brothers warehouse, or providing more waivers so Tribes can purchase food themselves.
6. How many and which specific Tribes are impacted by the food shortage?
7. What actions are being taken to hold Paris Brothers accountable for not meeting the contract obligations?
8. Is USDA opening another bid to solicit additional vendors to serve FDPIR? If so, when? If not, why?
9. Is the decision to use one contractor impacting other food distribution programs, such as the Commodity Supplemental Food Program? If so, please fully explain the extent of the problem and what USDA is doing to mitigate further food shortages in other programs.

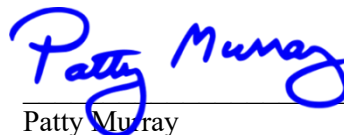
The uncertainty for our Tribal communities who rely so heavily on these food deliveries cannot continue. We expect you to use all available resources and authorities to rectify this situation as quickly as possible. If you find you need additional resources and authorities, please notify us immediately, as we want to work with you to resolve this expeditiously.

We look forward to your response.

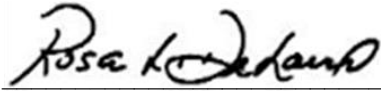
Sincerely,



Tom Cole
Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations



Patty Murray
Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations



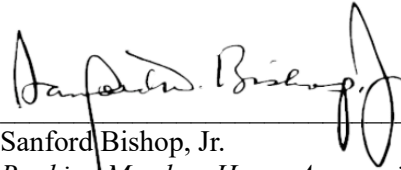
Rosa DeLauro
*Ranking Member, House Committee on
Appropriations*



Susan Collins
*Vice Chair, Senate Committee on
Appropriations*



Andy Harris, M.D.
*Chairman, House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies*



Sanford Bishop, Jr.
*Ranking Member, House Appropriations
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and Related Agencies*



Martin Heinrich
*Chairman, Senate Appropriations
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John Hoeven
*Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations
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Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies*



Mike Simpson
*Chairman, House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
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Chellie Pingree
*Ranking Member, House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies*