

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 9, 2023

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

The Honorable Samantha Power  
Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Administrator Power,

We are writing to request the immediate release of resources from the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, along with other resources available to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), to provide food aid to Palestinians in Gaza.<sup>1</sup> We believe the current situation in Gaza necessitates the utilization of the Trust, which was established to provide emergency assistance for populations facing acute hunger needs, among other resources created to address acute hunger needs.

Gaza is home to approximately two million Palestinian civilians, including more than one million children. Since Hamas's brutal October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks on Israel, and the ensuing war in Gaza, more than one and a half million Gazans have been displaced. In addition, Israel's near total siege of Gaza and the ongoing bombing campaign has turned a humanitarian crisis into a full-blown catastrophe with acute shortages of water, food, medicine, and fuel. According to the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP), stocks of some essential food items in Gaza, including rice, vegetable oil, and pulses, are nearing depletion. Even prior to October 7<sup>th</sup>, sixty-three percent of Gazan residents were food insecure, and eighty percent of Gaza's population relied on humanitarian assistance.<sup>2</sup> We need to facilitate and provide additional emergency assistance to Gaza to prevent a deepening of the humanitarian disaster and help save countless lives.

The Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust was created to respond to aberrant food security needs in times of unparalleled food crisis abroad. The WFP, which is already facing funding shortages, recently warned that an additional \$74 million is needed in the next three months to provide necessary food assistance for Gaza. Though the United States has provided financial assistance for humanitarian relief in Gaza and the West Bank, additional aid is necessary to address the intensifying food emergency faced by Palestinians in Gaza. We should do all we can to alleviate that burden.

The Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to release resources from the Trust, at the request of the USAID Administrator. We strongly urge you to utilize the Trust and other available resources to save the lives of Palestinian citizens during this unprecedented time. We also ask

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<sup>1</sup> United States Agency for International Development, *Fact Sheet: The Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust* (online at [www.usaid.gov/fact-sheet/bill-emerson-humanitarian-trust](http://www.usaid.gov/fact-sheet/bill-emerson-humanitarian-trust)).

<sup>2</sup> *Israel is at war with Hamas. Here's what to know*, CNN (October 16, 2023) (online at [www.cnn.com/2023/10/16/middleeast/israel-hamas-gaza-war-explained-week-2-mime-intl/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2023/10/16/middleeast/israel-hamas-gaza-war-explained-week-2-mime-intl/index.html)).

that your agencies provide a staff-level briefing by Wednesday, November 22<sup>nd</sup> to explain the steps you have taken, and plan to take, to provide food and other humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza.

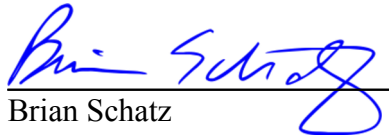
Sincerely,



Peter Welch  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator