



July 22, 2020

Tennessee State Board of Education
Mrs. Lillian Hartgrove, Chair
500 James Robertson Parkway
5th floor, Davy Crockett Tower
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Mrs. Hartgrove:

We live in challenging times, and we understand that complex issues and difficult solutions are unavoidable. Tennessee teachers count on their duty-free lunch, not only to eat their meal, but to return personal phone calls and check on their own children and family members who are also impacted by COVID-19. It is also usually the only time in a day that a teacher can use the restroom. Providing blanket waivers for school districts to circumvent a 30-minute period free from all duties and responsibilities connected with the instruction and supervision of students seems unnecessary for all schools within a district.

Every educator we talk with wants to be a team player during this return to school, and we understand that educators must apply common sense and be flexible. However, professional educators should not always have their rights trampled as the first resort in resolving an issue.

There are a number of reasons that our organization opposes a blanket duty-free lunch waiver. Not all schools located within a district requesting a waiver require a waiver. Any district requesting a waiver should identify which *specific schools* cannot meet the social distancing requirement if, in fact, that is the reason the request is being made. We understand the importance of social distancing, but also understand it is not limited to lunch time activities. Nevertheless, with staggered schedules and/or the use of other locations such as libraries, gyms, or music/band rooms within the school, this can likely be accomplished leaving duty free lunch intact, or at a minimum partially intact. In addition, reasonable efforts of a school district to use nonteaching personnel or the assistance of community volunteers to supervise students during lunch in multiple locations could also be considered. Schools could also consider expanded lunch schedules and shorter lunch breaks. If the State Board does grant a waiver for duty free lunch, we respectfully request that each district justify that request with more detail on a school-by-school basis within a district and for that information be made public.

Therefore, we object to a blanket waiver being issued to every single district that has requested it, without knowing the need of each school and what planning took place to address the issue before the request was made. Our organization and our members understand that some situations are unavoidable, and some circumstances unforeseen do exist. Illness, epidemic, and natural or man-made disasters happen. We think every effort should be undertaken before this particular waiver is granted to take away duty free lunch from so many educators. We also ask for you to share our sentiment with your fellow board members. I appreciate the commitment and service of the Tennessee Board of Education to our schools, educators and students.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JC Bowman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JC Bowman, PhD.
Executive Director