

August 30, 2021

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Secretary Shevaun Harris
Department of Children and Families
2415 North Monroe Street, Suite 400
Tallahassee, FL 32303

Re: Request that Florida participate in [Summer P-EBT](#): Do not reject \$820 million in federal food assistance for Florida's children

Dear Governor DeSantis and Secretary Harris:

We, the undersigned organizations, respectfully urge the state of Florida to elect to participate in Summer Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer program (Summer P-EBT) to help fight food insecurity among low-income children. **Unless administration leadership acts now, Florida is poised to leave \$820 million in federal pandemic food assistance from Summer P-EBT for [over 2 million](#) hungry children on the table.**

Summer P-EBT provides federal funding at no cost to states to deliver grocery benefits to children who missed out on free or reduced-price meals while their school or child care facilities were closed during the summer. Since summer feeding programs only reach [1 in 5 children](#) who receive free or reduced-price meals at school, Summer P-EBT is a way to ensure that children in participating states do not go hungry while school is out.

It is not too late for Florida to get this assistance to children in struggling families, who have already carried much of the burden of meal costs for their children over the summer and are playing catch up from added

food and other pandemic-related costs. Summer P-EBT benefits can be provided retroactively, and the United States Department of Agriculture is still accepting applications from states to run the program.

Summer P-EBT has strong bipartisan support and will not cost Floridians a penny. Most states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Texas, have already been approved to use these federal funds to feed hungry children. Yet Florida is one of [only a handful of states](#) that appears to have made no effort to get Summer P-EBT off the ground.

If Florida accepts available funds, the program would provide families with low income approximately [\\$6.82 a day to spend on a child's meals](#), or a total of about \$375 per child. Benefits from Summer P-EBT can only be used to purchase food and are entirely paid for by the federal government.

Opting into Summer P-EBT would make a difference between many children having enough to eat or going hungry. Florida's children continue to experience hunger and other hardships exacerbated by the financial impact of the pandemic. In a [survey of Florida households conducted by the Census Bureau from June 23, 2021, through July 5, 2021](#), 14 percent of adults living with children reported that their kids were not eating enough because the household could not afford food. Thirteen percent of renters said that they were not caught up on rent, and 30 percent reported that they were having trouble paying for their household's usual expenses.

Children of color [are disproportionately harmed](#) by delaying Summer P-EBT. Nationwide, roughly 51 percent of children in Black households, 47 percent in Latino households, and 30 percent in white households live in families that have trouble covering typical living expenses, such as food, housing, car payments, and medical expenses. The end result is that the delay in delivering Summer P-EBT only [heightens racial disparities](#).

The longer Florida waits to submit its plan, the longer families across the state will have to wait for this critical grocery benefit. In addition, rejecting Summer P-EBT also harms state and local economies. By turning its back on the program, Florida stands to lose almost a billion dollars that would otherwise be spent in local grocery stores and farmers markets, many of which are in desperate need of an influx of cash to recover from a year of steady economic decline.

The needs of children must be a priority as the state continues to move forward in its battle against COVID-19. Although it is not too late to implement the program, time is running out for families who are teetering on the edge. We respectfully ask that Florida policymakers act now to implement this critical nutrition program.

Thank you.

Sincerely,