



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the
Director

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Center for
Faith-Based and
Neighborhood
Partnerships

1400
Independence
Avenue, SW

Washington, DC
20250-9600

Dear Faith and Community Leaders,

A healthier future for our country begins with our children. Children need consistent access to nutritious foods to be healthy now and throughout their lives. USDA's food and nutrition assistance programs such as WIC, SNAP, school meals, and summer meals build on and complement each other to meet nutritional needs from birth throughout childhood and beyond. I'm writing you to let you know about a new federal nutrition program, called Summer EBT, and to offer suggestions for how faith-based leaders can play a pivotal role in reducing childhood hunger during the summer months by supporting this new opportunity.

More than 30 million children participate in school meal programs during the school year. However, when schools are closed, children lose access to these healthy meals and are at higher risk of food and nutrition insecurity. As a result, for many children, summer is the hungriest time of the year.

While we and our state and local partners – often with strong support from faith-based organizations -- have worked to leverage our summer feeding program to tackle summer hunger, traditional in-person summer meal sites historically only reach 1 in 6 children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals during the school year. Fortunately, as a result of new bi-partisan legislation, we have two new powerful tools to ensure every child gets the nourishment they need when school is out of session, including:

- A permanent option that began this past summer to provide non-congregate summer meals to children in certain rural areas such as “grab and go” meals or meal delivery; and
- A permanent, nationwide program called Summer EBT that, starting Summer 2024, will allow States to provide to low-income households with eligible children food dollars that can be spent at grocery stores.

Under this new program design, eligible children can combine Summer EBT benefits with either congregate or non-congregate meals. Our vision is that all States, Tribes, and territories will leverage the three tools we have—traditional congregate summer meals, non-congregate meals in certain rural communities, and Summer EBT—to ensure all children have the nutrition they need in the summer months.

Summer EBT is truly evidence-based policy at its best. Rigorous evaluations of Summer EBT demonstrations showed clearly that Summer EBT benefits work. Summer EBT benefits cut the number of children who experienced the most severe form of food insecurity during summer by 30%. On top of that, Summer EBT improved diet quality among participating children.

Simply put, Summer EBT is an incredible opportunity to end childhood hunger during the summer. Under the Summer EBT option, families will receive \$40 worth of food benefits per summer month on a pre-loaded EBT card for each eligible child. That amounts to a potential estimated \$3.5 billion going into the pockets of low-income families with children. Families will spend those dollars at retailers in their communities, which amounts to an important economic impact as well.

To ensure we maximize this historic opportunity, faith and community leaders can:

- Convene State and local faith-based leaders for critical discussions on how Summer EBT will advance in your community and how faith-based leaders can help ensure a successful rollout, for example, by supporting outreach.
 - USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) would welcome the opportunity to join upcoming meetings or conferences to discuss the importance of the expanded Federal summer nutrition programs.
- Encourage your congregations and communities to engage with Governors on the incredible opportunity that Summer EBT represents to respond to summer hunger.
 - Governors' leadership will be vital to establishing a strong vision for Summer Feeding. They can use their platforms, such as their State of the State addresses, their budget proposals, and convening power, to underscore their strong support for the new summer feeding options.
- Commit to supporting future outreach and marketing campaigns for the expanded summer meals programs.

These ideas and opportunities reflect the most critical, immediate actions you can take right now to ensure states are well positioned to launch Summer EBT. We welcome the opportunity to continue engaging with you as there are other important needs that faith-based leaders can help address in terms of supporting program operations and outreach.

If you are open to engaging on our expanded summer nutrition programs, please fill out this interest form: <http://bit.ly/USDAPartner>. To learn more about our exciting new, expanded summer nutrition programs, please visit our website at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/summer>.

In closing, we have before us a remarkable opportunity to address childhood hunger at scale—to provide grocery dollars to the families of every child in need, and to use all our tools to ensure NO child goes hungry over the summer. We recognize that each of you, as faith and community leaders, have an important voice and role as we work together toward this shared goal.

Thank you for all that you do,

Samantha Joseph
Director, Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Enclosure

Relevant Materials:

- Summer EBT Landing Page: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sebt>
- Summer EBT Implementation Toolkit:
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sebt/implementation-toolkit>
- 5 Ways Governors Can Support: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sebt/governor-support>
- Summer EBT — A Tested and Effective Strategy to Reduce Summer Hunger:
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sebt/evidence>
- States and tribal nations partner with USDA to kick off new summer grocery benefit program for families:
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/stakeholder-notification/sebt/kick-off-new-summer-grocery-benefits>