

Pandemic-Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) Program

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May 29, 2020 | 2020-R-0152

Issue

This report describes the Pandemic-Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program in Connecticut and other states in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Summary

The federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) authorizes the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to approve state plans to distribute P-EBT benefits to households with children who, but for pandemic-related school closures, would receive free or reduced-price meals at school. The benefit amount is based on the number of days schools are closed and the federal reimbursement rates for school meals.

Connecticut received USDA approval for its P-EBT program on April 24 and for its amended plan on May 5. The amended plan reflects the governor's decision to close schools for the remainder of the school year. The state's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) agency, the Department of Social Services (DSS), will distribute a one-time benefit of \$364.80 in SNAP P-EBT benefits per eligible child. Households that already have EBT cards due to enrollment in SNAP or Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) received the benefit May 24. Other households will receive the benefit at later dates, in part because DSS must mail new EBT cards to them.

Federal Legislation and Guidance

FFCRA ([P.L. 116-127](#)) authorizes the USDA secretary to approve state plans for P-EBT programs. Under the act, during federal fiscal year 2020, whenever a school is closed for at least five consecutive days during a designated public health emergency when the school would otherwise be in session, state P-EBT programs can provide a benefit to each household with at least one child eligible for either free or reduced-price lunch at the school under the National School Lunch Act ([42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.](#)).

The benefit is a SNAP benefit distributed via EBT card and is based on 2019-2020 National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program reimbursement rates. For most states, the benefit is \$5.70 per day (\$3.50 for lunch and \$2.20 for breakfast), with higher rates for Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. By law, the benefit is for a minimum of five school days, but the total number of days depends on how long schools are closed in a given state. The benefit amount is the same regardless of whether the student receives free or reduced-price lunch.

According to USDA, for households that already have an EBT card (e.g., households enrolled in SNAP or TFA) will receive P-EBT on that card. States will have to distribute new EBT cards to households not enrolled in these programs. FFCRA allows state educational agencies and school food authorities to share information with state SNAP agencies in order to distribute benefits.

Implementation in Connecticut

USDA initially approved Connecticut’s plan to distribute P-EBT benefits based on school closures from March 17 to May 20. The state subsequently amended the plan to reflect the decision to close schools through the end of the school year, extending the number of benefit days from 47 to 64. As a result, DSS will distribute a one-time benefit of \$364.80 in SNAP P-EBT benefits (64 days x \$5.70) for each eligible child in the household as described in Table 1.

Table 1: P-EBT Benefit Distribution Planned Dates

<i>Household Enrollment</i>		<i>Planned Date of Benefit Distribution</i>	<i>Estimated Number of Households</i>
Enrolled in SNAP		May 24	55,200
Not Enrolled in SNAP	Enrolled in TFA	May 24	800
	Enrolled in Medicaid	June 7	80,000
	Not Enrolled in TFA or Medicaid	June 21	

Source: [DSS](#)

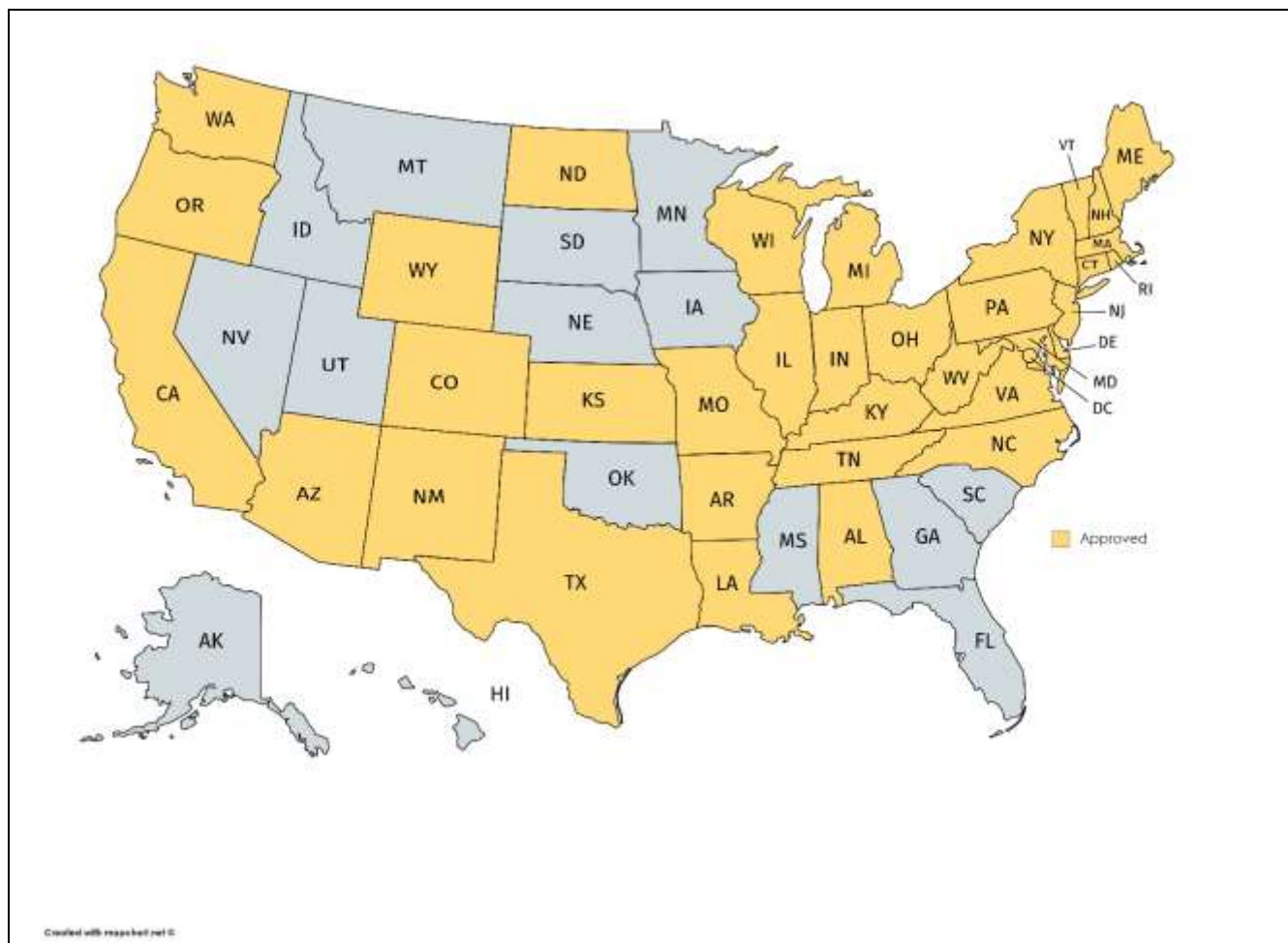
Households with members who are currently enrolled in SNAP or TFA already have EBT cards and will receive benefits before other households. DSS will mail EBT cards to those who do not have them.

In total, approximately 136,000 Connecticut households are expected to receive over \$97 million in federally funded P-EBT benefits. According to DSS, benefits will reach 265,631 public school students and 1,748 private school students.

Other States

As of May 27, at least 34 states and Washington D.C. have received approval for P-EBT programs, as shown in Figure 1. According to [reporting in The New York Times](#), as of May 15, 15% of eligible children had received P-EBT benefits, 12 states had begun distributing benefits, and two states (Rhode Island and Michigan) had finished distributing benefits.

Figure 1: States with Approved P-EBT Plans



Source: [USDA](#)

Resources

CTMirror, ["CT Distributing Pandemic Food for Children to Some, but Not Yet All,"](#) May 28, 2020.

USDA, ["Memorandum: State Plan for Pandemic EBT \(P-EBT\),"](#) March 20, 2020.

USDA, ["Memorandum: P-EBT Frequently Asked Questions #1,"](#) April 15, 2020.

USDA, ["Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer Program \(P-EBT\) Approval of Connecticut State Plan,"](#) April 24, 2020.

USDA, ["Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer Program \(P-EBT\) Approval of Connecticut's State Plan Amendment,"](#) May 5, 2020.

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