



August 5, 2020

Governor John Bel Edwards
900 N. Third St., #4
Baton Rouge, LA 70802
Via email

Superintendent Cade Brumley
Department of Education
1201 N. Third St.
Baton Rouge, LA 70802
Via email

Secretary Marketa Garner Walters
Department of Children and Family Services
627 N. Fourth St.
Baton Rouge, LA 70802
Via email

Dear Governor Edwards, Superintendent Brumley, and Secretary Walters:

As you are aware, the coronavirus pandemic and its economic effects have severely affected the ability of many Louisiana families to feed their children. Estimates of child hunger and of food insecurity among households with children in our state vary, but the strong consensus of recent research is that Louisiana families with children face continuing and historically unprecedented hardship.

According to the U.S. Census Household Pulse survey, [more than a third](#) of Louisiana households with children (34.6%) experienced food insecurity each week since the beginning of May. Alarming, while parents generally buffer children from food scarcity, skipping or skimping on meals to feed their children, during this crisis *children themselves* are experiencing hunger at rates unprecedented in recent decades. Adults in [1 in 4 Louisiana households with children](#) report that children in their household didn't have enough to eat because adults couldn't afford it.

In the face of this crisis, the undersigned organizations urge you to re-open applications for Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) benefits, and to take the opportunity of the beginning of the new school year to conduct coordinated outreach to families who were eligible for the benefit during the last school year, but who did not receive it.

We applaud the state's work to develop and rapidly implement P-EBT statewide over the summer, despite student privacy constraints in state law and the substantial challenges that the pandemic

posed to school and public benefit administration. As a result of those efforts, Nearly 470,800 eligible children were approved for P-EBT, out of a total of roughly 729,500 children eligible for the benefit.

The new school year affords an opportunity to reach the nearly 259,000 kids who were eligible for P-EBT but did not successfully complete the application before the June deadline. This opportunity is particularly important as the start of school removes a significant barrier that many parents faced in attempting to complete the P-EBT application during the summer: the inability to contact school officials to confirm or correct the student information the application required for automated benefit approval. With school back in session, school administrators are now far better positioned to respond to parent inquiries than they were during the original application period.

To make up the gap between eligible children and those receiving the benefit, we recommend the following actions:

- **Submit a P-EBT plan amendment to USDA to re-open applications through Sept. 15.**
- **Establish a coordinated process by which Local Educational Agencies can contract with DCFS to batch process district lists of children eligible for the benefit, as of June 2020.**
- **Translate the P-EBT application portal into Spanish, Vietnamese, and Arabic, so that speakers of Louisiana's most commonly spoken languages other than English can access the application more easily.**
- **If possible in the time available, upgrade the application portal to a robustly mobile-friendly format.**
- **Conduct outreach through schools, community partners, and earned and paid media to inform families of the new opportunity to apply for the benefit.**
- **Provide training and/or informational materials for school administrators explaining the benefit and what information parents may need to complete the P-EBT application.**

While Congress has not yet acted on a renewal of P-EBT benefits into the 2020-21 school year, all of these actions would leave the state better prepared to issue additional benefits if and when those benefits are approved. Nonetheless, even without an additional round of P-EBT, these actions would provide essential aid to struggling families at a time of great need, and up to \$73 million dollars of additional economic stimulus as our state economy struggles to recover.

Should the state choose to re-open the P-EBT application process, national and state non-profit partners stand ready to provide material, technical, and communications support for this effort. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.

Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented crisis. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Agenda for Children
Allen Council on Aging
Children and Families Action Network
Delgado Community College/Single Stop
Feeding Louisiana
Hadassah New Orleans
Jane Place Neighborhood Sustainability Initiative
Jewish Family Service of Greater New Orleans
Louisiana Appleseed
Louisiana Association of United Ways
Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center
Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families
Louisiana Budget Project
Market Umbrella
New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee
No Kid Hungry Louisiana
Power Coalition for Equity and Justice
Recirculating Farms Coalition
ResourceFull Consulting
Southeast Community Health Systems
SPLC Action Fund
The First 72+
Top Box Foods Louisiana
Tulane Nutrition
United Way of Southeast Louisiana
Volunteers of America, Greater Baton Rouge
Volunteers of America, North Louisiana