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EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY
AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1006

March 3rd, 2022

The Honorable Brian Kemp
Governor, State of Georgia
206 Washington Street
Suite 203, State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Governor Kemp:

I am writing this letter to request Georgia's timeline to apply for the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program for School Year 2021-2022. As you know, Georgia's participation in the P-EBT program over the previous two years has prevented hundreds of thousands of children from going hungry across our state, and prematurely cutting off access to this vital form of food assistance will have a devastating impact on Georgia's families.

Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) was first established by Congress as a response to remote schooling and reduction of school hours due to the COVID-19 pandemic for children who receive free or reduced-price meals, with the federal government covering 100 percent of administrative costs. This program was authorized by the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* (FFCRA) and allowed states to provide funding to those children who temporarily lost access to school meals. The monetary value, \$6.82 per day¹, of missed breakfast, lunch, and snack is provided to kids and their families, and throughout the pandemic the P-EBT program has prevented children nationwide from food insecurity during remote schooling. The measurable impact of this program includes a 30 percent reduction in food hardship for low-income children in the week following benefit issuance.²

During the summer months, children are most vulnerable to food insecurity since schools are out of session and summer meal programs only reach a small percentage of children. If a state's plan for P-EBT is approved by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), then any child eligible for free or reduced-priced meals is eligible for P-EBT benefits over the summer. States who do not have an approved plan are putting children's access to food during the summer months in jeopardy.

¹ Georgia: Covid-19 waivers & flexibilities. Georgia: COVID-19 Waivers & Flexibilities | Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/georgia#snap>. Published January 25, 2022. Accessed February 3, 2022.

² Leung CW, Stewart AL, Portela-Parra ET, Adler NE, Laraia BA, Epel ES. Understanding the Psychological Distress of Food Insecurity: A Qualitative Study of Children's Experiences and Related Coping Strategies. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2020;120(3):395-403. doi:10.1016/j.jand.2019.10.012.

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State leaders should take advantage of every opportunity to prevent children in our communities from going hungry. Food insecurity negatively affects a child's development by potentially creating irreversible damages. The psychological aspect of food insecurity takes a heavy toll on children and the pattern of unpredictable meals can lead to high anxiety and stress for both children and caregivers.^{3,4,5} Stress and nutritional deficiencies can alter a child's brain architecture leading to a weak foundation for learning, behavior, and health.⁶ By submitting and being approved, the state of Georgia will be able to immediately and directly counteract child food insecurity through P-EBT.

In Georgia, the total participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in FY21 was 819,160 children and preliminary participation numbers for the School Breakfast Program in FY21 was 554,334 children.⁷ This means that over 800,000 children are at risk of losing out on federally funded nutrition assistance this summer if the state does not take action.

Once again, it is vital that Georgia promptly submits a state plan for P-EBT so that children can be fed during these upcoming summer months and be protected from the harmful effects of food insecurity. During times like these we must use all resources possible to protect children.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I appreciate your response.

Sincerely,



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress

³Leung CW, Stewart AL, Portela-Parra ET, Adler NE, Laraia BA, Epel ES. Understanding the Psychological Distress of Food Insecurity: A Qualitative Study of Children's Experiences and Related Coping Strategies. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2020;120(3):395-403. doi:10.1016/j.jand.2019.10.012.

⁴Weinreb L, Wehler C, Perloff J, et al. Hunger: Its Impact on Children's Health and Mental Health. *Pediatrics*. 2002;110(4). doi:10.1542/peds.110.4.e41.

⁵Promoting Food Security for All Children. *Pediatrics*. 2015;136(5). doi:10.1542/peds.2015-3301.

⁶Shonkoff JP, Garner AS, Siegel BS, et al. The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress. *Pediatrics*. 2011;129(1). doi:10.1542/peds.2011-2663.

⁷Child Nutrition Tables | USDA Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>. Published January 14, 2022. Accessed February 3, 2022.