



Food and Nutrition
Service

1320 Braddock Place
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April 10, 2023

**SUBJECT: Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer Program (P-EBT)
Approval of Arkansas' State Plan for Summer 2023**

**TO: Bill Ludwig
Regional Administrator
Southwest Regional Office**

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127; the Act), as amended, authorized a temporary assistance program for households with children without access to meals in school and to certain SNAP-enrolled children in child care during the public health emergency originally declared in January 2020. The March 11, 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARP, P.L. 117-2) extended P-EBT through the end of the federal COVID public health emergency (PHE) and, for school children, the summer following the end of the PHE.

Pursuant to the authority granted under Section 1101 of the Act, FNS approves Arkansas' enclosed plan to issue P-EBT benefits to children in schools for summer 2023.

Summary of State's Plan

The Arkansas Department of Human Services and the Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education will issue P-EBT benefits through the state's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) EBT card system to households with eligible children. In general, school children are eligible for benefits if they would have received free or reduced price meals at their schools through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) if not for the closure or reduced attendance or hours of their schools. The ARP deems all schools closed for the 2023 P-EBT covered summer period.

The state and its school districts will identify the children who were eligible to receive free or reduced price NSLP meals as of the end of school year 2022-2023. The state will offer households who become income-eligible for free or reduced price meals the ability to establish their eligibility through the end of school year 2022-2023. In addition, the state and its school districts will identify eligible children through direct certification during the same period.

In addition, Arkansas has or will:

- issue the U.S. standard benefit of \$120 to all eligible children,
- tentatively issue a single benefit for the entire summer period between July and September 2023,
- require school districts to ensure student data is accurate, in the state reporting system, as of the May 31, 2023 deadline set by the state; eligible student information will be pulled from the state reporting system after May 31, 2023:

- DESE will develop and share a flow chart with local Superintendents and Child Nutrition Directors for distribution within their communities,
- the school district will ensure parents are aware of deadlines for submitting applications before the end of their school year,
- DESE will pull student data on June 2, 2023 to allow districts to meet the May 31, 2023 deadline,
- identify and issue benefits to children who were enrolled in school at the end of the school year but become categorically eligible for free meals through enrollment in SNAP or TANF during the summer months,
- ensure all benefits are issued prior to the September 30, 2023 deadline (end of the fiscal year).

Finally, the state will identify risks for improper payments and ensure a high level of integrity.

Estimated Caseload and Value of P-EBT Benefits

Arkansas estimates that it will issue \$33.1 million to approximately 276,000 school children during the 2023 covered summer period.

Release of Information

Pursuant to Section 1101(e) of the Act, the Secretary hereby authorizes the release of the information necessary to carry out P-EBT in Arkansas. Section 1101(e) of the Act states, “Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Agriculture may authorize state educational agencies and school food authorities administering a school lunch program under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.) to release to appropriate officials administering the supplemental nutrition assistance program such information as may be necessary to carry out this section.”

Plan Timetable and Revisions

Arkansas will distribute benefits to households consistent with the timeframes identified in the state plan. Should the state encounter challenges or delays that significantly impair its ability to implement the approved P-EBT plan or require substantive changes, the state must notify the FNS Regional Office as soon as possible. The FNS Regional Office will work with the state to identify reasonable solutions and review revised plans for approval or further revision.

Civil Rights

Arkansas will continue to comply with civil rights requirements by not discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. The state will also provide meaningful access to its programs and activities for individuals who are limited English proficient, and provide equal access to individuals with disabilities.

Administrative Funds

The Arkansas Department of Human Services will participate in a P-EBT Administrative Budget Planning process using the FNS-366(a) Program and Budget Summary. When the FNS-366(a) is finalized, that will determine the state's Administrative Grant level. However, the FNS-366(a), Program and Budget Summary, may be updated and revised as the state's operational plan evolves.

Reporting

The Arkansas Department of Human Services will complete the FNS-292B, the FNS-46, the FNS-388, and the FNS-778 reports in accordance with existing requirements.

FNS values Arkansas' partnership in the administration of Pandemic EBT. FNS stands ready to provide additional support as needed. If you have questions, please contact the FNS Southwest Regional Office.

Sincerely,

Cindy Long
Administrator