



Food and Nutrition
Service

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March 14, 2023

SUBJECT: Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer Program (P-EBT)
Approval of the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands' State Plan
for Summer 2022

TO: Jesus Mendoza, Jr.
Regional Administrator
Western 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 (the ARP, P.L. 117-2) extends P-EBT through the end of the public health emergency, a period that includes the summer of 2022.

Pursuant to the authority granted under Section 1101 of the Act, FNS approves the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands' enclosed plan to issue P-EBT benefits to children in schools and child care for the 2022 covered summer period.

Summary of State's Plan

The Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Department of Community and Cultural Affairs and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands Department of Education will issue P-EBT benefits through the Commonwealth'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. Children in child care are eligible if they are enrolled in SNAP and their child care facility is closed or operating with reduced attendance or hours, or if they live in the area of a school that is closed or operating with reduced attendance or hours. The ARP deems all schools closed for the 2022 P-EBT covered summer period.

Children in Schools

The Commonwealth 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 2021-2022. The Commonwealth will offer households who become income-eligible for free or reduced price meals the ability to establish their eligibility during the 2022 covered summer period. In addition, the Commonwealth and its school districts will identify eligible children through direct certification during the same period.

In addition, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands will:

- issue the U.S. standard benefit of \$455 to all eligible children,

- collect school rosters of children from all public and private schools, since all public and private school students receive free or reduced price meals through USDA's Child Nutrition grant under the Community Eligibility Provision,
 - CNMI will identify school children who were actively enrolled or graduated at the last month of SY 2021-2022,
- tentatively issue a single benefit for the entire summer period starting in June 2023 to all eligible children, and
- ensure benefits are issued prior to the September 30, 2023 deadline (end of the Fiscal Year 2023).

Children in Child Care

The Commonwealth will, at a minimum, identify all children under age 6 who are enrolled in SNAP during the covered summer period and prior to the end of the federal COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE), if applicable. The Commonwealth will ensure that children who receive a benefit through P-EBT's child care component do not also receive a benefit through P-EBT's school component for the covered summer period. Finally, the Commonwealth will await confirmation from USDA that the PHE will extend through the end of the covered summer period before issuing the full summer benefit to children in child care.

In addition, Northern Mariana Islands will:

- issue the U.S. standard benefit of \$455 to all eligible children,
- issue P-EBT benefits for the full covered summer period to children who participated in NAP in June, July or August 2022,
- tentatively issue a single benefit for the entire summer period starting in June 2023 to all eligible children, and
- ensure benefits are issued prior to the September 30, 2023 deadline (end of the Fiscal Year 2023).

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

Estimated Caseload and Value of P-EBT Benefits

The Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands estimates that it will issue \$5.0 million to approximately 11,000 school children during the 2022 covered summer period. The Commonwealth estimates that it will issue \$1.1 million to approximately 2,000 SNAP-enrolled children in child care assuming the PHE continues through the end of the summer.

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 the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands. 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

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

Civil Rights

The Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands will continue to comply with civil rights requirements, to include providing equal access to individuals with disabilities and individuals who are limited English proficient.

Administrative Funds

The Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands Department of Community and Cultural Affairs 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 Commonwealth’s Administrative Grant level. However, the FNS-366(a), Program and Budget Summary, may be updated and revised as the Commonwealth’s operational plan evolves.

Reporting

The Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands Department of Community and Cultural Affairs will complete the FNS-292B, the FNS-46, the FNS-388, and the FNS-778 reports in accordance with existing requirements.

FNS appreciates the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands’ commitment to meet the nutritional needs of children during a challenging time. If you have questions, please contact the FNS Western Regional Office.

Sincerely,

Cindy Long
Administrator