

April 10, 2023

Governor Greg Gianforte
PO Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620-0801

Director Charlie Brereton
PO Box 4210
Helena MT 59604-4210

Dear Governor Gianforte and Director Brereton,

Thank you for your efforts on Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) in Montana. This program, which was established under the Trump Administration, has been a lifeline for thousands of struggling families in our state. We are grateful that Montana created and implemented a plan to issue benefits in each of the previous rounds that P-EBT was available. But Montana is currently poised to miss out on benefits that would help families during this school year and summer.

Many states including Utah, Alabama, Indiana and Arizona have plans approved by USDA for the 2022-2023 school year, summer 2023, or both. Montana families also need this program.

P-EBT has been crucial to Montana families over the last several years. As the pandemic continues to impact the cost of living and in particular, the cost of food, P-EBT plays a vital role in helping families with children afford groceries. Inflation, housing prices, and challenges accessing childcare are making it difficult for many Montana families to afford enough food each month.

If Montana does not participate in the P-EBT program this school year and summer, our state is poised to leave over \$10 million in federal food assistance for children on the table. This is not only money that can provide nutrition to children, but federal dollars that would be infused into Montana's economy.

In addition to providing needed food assistance, it is administratively prudent for Montana to issue P-EBT in summer 2023. For summer 2023, states can receive 100% administrative funding from the federal government. For the new permanent Summer EBT program that begins in 2024, states will only receive 50% administrative funding from the federal government. It would be beneficial to the state to set up systems this summer, in 2023 using the 100% administrative funding, putting our state in a stronger position to administer the program in 2024. If Montana chooses not to take advantage of this funding, DPHHS will need to set up permanent administrative systems ahead of summer 2024 when the federal government will only cover 50% of administrative costs.

We would also like to note that federal guidance indicates that all P-EBT benefits must to be issued by September 30, 2023. For this reason, it is essential to create a plan in a timely fashion. Fortunately, USDA has indicated that school year plans for children under age 6 can follow a similar implementation

strategy that was used in the prior school year, streamlining the process of developing and implementing a plan.

We, the undersigned, urge Governor Gianforte and the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) to submit a plan to USDA to provide all eligible children with School Year 2022-2023 and Summer 2023 P-EBT benefits. The hard work of the Department to provide P-EBT benefits in previous years has been the difference between hunger and nourishment for struggling families across Montana. They still need your help in order to receive much needed benefits for this school year and the summer.

Sincerely,

Lorianne Burhop, Chief Policy Officer
Montana Food Bank Network
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ACLU of Montana
Alternative Energy Resources Organization
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
Anaconda Ministerial Project Care
Beaverhead Community Food Pantry
Beaverhead County Resource Assistance Center
Big Sky Lavender Farms
Bigfork Food Bank
Blue Mountain Clinic
Community Food and Agriculture Coalition
Community Hope
Darby Bread Box
Dawson County Best Beginnings
District 4 Human Resources Development Council
Episcopal Diocese of Montana
Fergus County Council on Aging
Flathead Food Bank
Gallatin Valley Farm to School
Haven House Food Bank
Healthy Communities Coalition of Mineral County
Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies-The Montana Coalition
Livingston Food Resource Center
Montana Federation of Public Employees
Missoula Food Bank & Community Center
Montana Budget and Policy Center
Montana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Montana NOW

Montana Women Vote

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

North Valley Food Bank

RE Services

Red Nations for Education

SEIU 775

Sincerely Paul Feeding His Sheep

St. Vincent de Paul

Teton County Food Pantry

Trout Creek Senior Citizens, Inc.

YCA Human Trafficking Task Force

Zero to Five Montana

Cc:

David Gerard, Deputy Director, MT DPHHS

Jessie Counts, Division Administrator, Human and Community Services Division, MT DPHHS

Erica Johnston, Executive Director, Human Services, MT DPHHS

Christine Emerson, School Nutrition Programs Director, Montana Office of Public Instruction