

May 7, 2020

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTOR LETTER**

The purpose of this All County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) with information regarding implementation of provisions of the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act \(the Act\)](#) section 1101(d) pertaining to California Pandemic EBT (P-EBT).



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May 7, 2020

**ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER**

**TO:** ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

**FROM:** JENNIFER HERNANDEZ, DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT DIVISION

**SUBJECT:** IMPLEMENTATION OF PANDEMIC EBT (P-EBT)

**REFERENCE:** H.R. 6201 FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE ACT

The purpose of this All County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) with information regarding implementation of provisions of the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act \(the Act\)](#) section 1101(d) pertaining to California Pandemic EBT (P-EBT).

California has experienced a rapid increase in the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Extensive public health warnings have been issued statewide to reduce exposure, including orders to practice social distancing and eliminate group gatherings. The majority of schools across the state closed on March 16<sup>th</sup> in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. All California schools have or will be shifting to distance learning for the remainder of the 2019-20 academic school year. This has resulted in nearly 4 million students potentially losing regular access to free or reduced-price (FRP) meals at school.

To ensure students are receiving an alternative to FRP meals in response to COVID-19 school closures, the Act section 1101(d) provides authority for the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide P-EBT food benefits. The P-EBT benefit amount will be equal to the value of school meals for each day the majority of California schools are closed. The value of the school meals is based on the federal reimbursement rate for breakfast and lunch at the free rate, as specified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

### **COUNTY WELFARE DEPARMENTS ROLE IN P-EBT**

The CWDs will not be responsible for implementing P-EBT. However, because of CWDs role as trusted community service providers, the CDSS does anticipate that eligible families will contact CWDs with general questions about P-EBT. Because P-EBT benefits are a critical nutrition support provided in response to COVID-19, the CDSS is asking CWDs to proactively share information about the availability of P-EBT benefits with eligible families.

The purpose of this ACWDL is to assist CWDs with sharing information about P-EBT and answering questions received from P-EBT eligible families.

### **P-EBT ELIGIBILITY**

Families are eligible for P-EBT if they:

- Include an eligible child or children, who if not for the school closure during a public health emergency designation and due to concerns about a COVID-19 outbreak, would receive FRP meals, and
- The child's school has been closed for at least 5 consecutive days during a public health emergency designation and due to concerns about a COVID-19 outbreak.

Because all school facilities across California have closed as a result of COVID-19, all students eligible for FRP meals statewide are eligible for P-EBT. This includes students attending public charter schools and private schools so long as the charter school or private school participates in the federally funded School Breakfast Program and/or the National School Lunch Program.

### **VERIFICATION OF P-EBT ELIGIBILITY**

P-EBT eligibility verification and tracking will occur at the state-level and will not impact the CWDs. The CDSS will take one of two routes to verify a student's eligibility for P-EBT:

- Automatic eligibility for those FRP meal eligible students receiving certain benefits, including CalFresh, CalWORKs, Medi-Cal and foster care, that result in their direct certification for FRP meals, or
- An online application for those FRP meal eligible students not receiving benefits that result in their direct certification for FRP meals, but that are currently approved for FRP meals based on the paper application process or community eligibility.

In verifying eligibility, the CDSS will first identify all students who are currently FRP meal eligible statewide. The CDSS will accomplish this through a universal data exchange agreement with the California Department of Education (CDE). Second, the CDSS will identify which students are automatically eligible for P-EBT and which students must apply online.

Students who receive CalFresh, CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, or foster care and have been directly certified will be automatically eligible for P-EBT. Families with children deemed automatically eligible for P-EBT will receive a P-EBT card in the mail without applying for P-EBT.

Students who are FRP meal eligible, but who are not automatically eligible for P-EBT will need to fill out a short online application (see Online Application section below). The information provided through the application will be checked against the list of all students who are FRP meal eligible statewide to verify that the student was approved to receive FRP meals for the 2019-20 school year. If verified eligible, families will receive a P-EBT card in the mail within 5-10 days of application.

### **P-EBT ONLINE APPLICATION**

P-EBT card issuance will begin May 8 to all automatically eligible families. If a family believes themselves to be eligible for P-EBT but has not received a P-EBT card by about May 25, they should apply online. The CDSS will administer the P-EBT online application, developed in partnership with Code for America. The online application will be available through a dedicated P-EBT URL and will include an “information page” where families can learn more about P-EBT. The application will be user-friendly and available in English, Spanish, and Chinese. The application will launch on May 22.

- Eligible families can apply for P-EBT here beginning on May 22: <https://ca.p-ebt.org/>
- Eligible families can access the P-EBT information page here beginning now: <https://ca.p-ebt.org/info>

### **P-EBT BENEFIT AMOUNT**

The P-EBT benefit amount is equal to the daily federal reimbursement rate for free breakfast and lunch multiplied by the average number of days schools were closed each month for each eligible child. California has been approved to provide benefits for all school days from March 16<sup>th</sup> through June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Based on the federal per diem reimbursement for free breakfast of \$2.20 and lunch of \$3.50, the daily P-EBT benefit will be \$5.70.

Most P-EBT eligible children will receive a total of \$365 in P-EBT benefits. Families that must complete an application will receive the full amount as long as they apply by June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. P-EBT is a one-time benefit. Eligible families who are required to apply and do not to do so by June 30, 2020 will not be able to receive benefits once the online application closes.

A very limited number of P-EBT eligible children who were directly certified eligible for FRP meals for the first time this school year after the school closure will receive less than \$365 in P-EBT benefits depending on the month in which they were directly certified as eligible for FRP meals. These P-EBT eligible children, like others directly certified before the school closure, do not need to apply online. That said, these families' P-EBT card may arrive in the mail as late as the end of the month of June depending on when they were directly certified.

### **P-EBT CARDS**

Eligible families will receive a standalone P-EBT card. The P-EBT card will look different than California's EBT card that is used to issue CalFresh and CalWORKs benefits. The P-EBT card is black and white and clearly labeled 'P-EBT Card'. All P-EBT cards will arrive in the mail with a card insert containing information on how the family can activate the card. While they will look different, P-EBT cards can be used just like regular EBT cards. They will be accepted at all locations that CalFresh EBT cards are accepted including grocery stores, farmer's markets, and at approved online grocery retailers.

### **EBT SYSTEM INFORMATION**

FIS has set up County 70 for the management of P-EBT cases and benefits. County users with access to the EBT EDGE Web Admin system will be able to view P-EBT cardholders and benefits in County 70 in read-only format and P-EBT cases will be included in search results. The EBT case number, or State Unique Identifier (SUID), for all P-EBT cases begins with "70". Initial and replacement P-EBT cards can only be mailed to clients by FIS. There is no over-the-counter issuance of P-EBT cards. P-EBT cards include the regular EBT customer service number on the back and cardholders should be referred to this number as the first line of help for P-EBT issues.

### **P-EBT, CALFRESH AND "TO GO" SCHOOL MEALS**

P-EBT is not the same as or a replacement for CalFresh benefits. P-EBT is a separate food benefit that will be provided to eligible CalFresh and non-CalFresh households with children who may have temporarily lost access to FRP meals. P-EBT will have no bearing on CalFresh eligibility.

P-EBT eligible families may receive P-EBT, CalFresh, and “to go” school meals at the same time. P-EBT eligible families do not need to choose between these available resources.

### **PROPOSED P-EBT TIMELINE**

P-EBT Card Issuance Begins: May 8, 2020

- California’s EBT vendor will begin issuing P-EBT cards to families determined P-EBT eligible based on direct certification data.
- The first phase of P-EBT card issuance to about 2 million eligible children is anticipated to be complete within 14 days.

Online Application Launch: May 22, 2020

- The P-EBT online application will launch after P-EBT cards have been issued to families determined eligible based on direct certification data.
- P-EBT cards are expected to arrive via mail 5-10 days from the date of application.

Online Application Closes: June 30, 2020

- The P-EBT online application will close on June 30, 2020. Final P-EBT cards are expected to arrive via mail 5-10 days from the close of the application.

### **P-EBT OUTREACH**

The CDSS and CDE will implement a phased and targeted outreach plan to ensure that all children eligible for FRP meals across the state are aware of the availability of P-EBT. The P-EBT outreach plan will be carried out by education partners, including schools and school districts, as well as community-based organizations and CWDs who serve families with low income.

The goal of the outreach plan will be to ensure families who are eligible and receive their P-EBT benefits via data match know what P-EBT benefits are and why they are getting them, how to activate and use their P-EBT benefits, where to get more info about P-EBT benefits, and that they do not need to apply online. Families who are eligible for P-EBT benefits but not identified through the data match should know they need to apply online, where to apply online, and how to get more info about P-EBT benefits.

The CWDs can spread the word about P-EBT by directing clients to information regarding P-EBT. The CDSS will be posting partner outreach materials, including flyers and FAQs, at [www.cdss.ca.gov/pandemic-ebt](http://www.cdss.ca.gov/pandemic-ebt).

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Clients can also visit [www.ca.p-ebt.org/](http://www.ca.p-ebt.org/) or [www.ca.p-ebt.org/info](http://www.ca.p-ebt.org/info)

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the CalFresh Policy Bureau at [CalFreshPolicy@dss.ca.gov](mailto:CalFreshPolicy@dss.ca.gov).