

November 2, 2020

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

The purpose of this All County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) and stakeholders with information regarding the extension of the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program and the transition of P-EBT cardholder support to the P-EBT Helpline.



KIM JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
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GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

November 2, 2020

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

FROM: JENNIFER HERNANDEZ
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT DIVISION

SUBJECT: PANDEMIC EBT EXTENSION

REFERENCE: FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE ACT (HR 6201)

The purpose of this All County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) and stakeholders with information regarding the extension of the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program and the transition of P-EBT cardholder support responsibilities from the CWDs to the P-EBT Helpline beginning on November 9, 2020.

Background

In response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic emergency, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 provided the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to approve state plans for the issuance of temporary emergency nutrition benefits, known as P-EBT benefits, to children who would otherwise receive free or reduced-price school meals under the federal School Breakfast Program and/or National School Lunch Program if not for school facility closures resulting from the pandemic emergency. In response, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the California Department of Education (CDE) jointly submitted a plan to the United States Department of Agriculture and were approved to implement P-EBT.

The P-EBT program originally provided food benefits to eligible school aged children for the months of March, April, May, and June 2020. This initial round of benefits is referred to as "P-EBT 1.0". California launched P-EBT 1.0 operations in early May 2020, and as of September 30, 2020, completed issuance of P-EBT 1.0 cards to children determined

eligible through a data match between CDSS and CDE. This unprecedented effort resulted in over 3.7 million eligible children receiving P-EBT 1.0 benefits totaling nearly \$1.4 billion. A P-EBT 1.0 Outcomes Report can be found [here](#).

On August 31, 2020 CDSS transitioned P-EBT 1.0 cardholder support responsibilities to the CWDs. These responsibilities include supporting existing P-EBT 1.0 cardholders with requests for PIN set-up support and replacement P-EBT cards. The CWDs did not assume any P-EBT 1.0 eligibility responsibilities and were not able to issue P-EBT 1.0 benefits to children not already issued benefits by CDSS and CDE.

P-EBT Extension

Recently, California was approved to issue additional P-EBT benefits for the months of August and September 2020. This is referred to as the “P-EBT extension”. P-EBT extension benefits are intended to provide nutrition benefits to children who would otherwise receive free or reduced-price school meals at the school facility if not for the disruption to in-person instruction resulting from the pandemic emergency.

Under the P-EBT extension, most children who received P-EBT 1.0 benefits will receive P-EBT extension benefits. Children who previously received P-EBT 1.0 benefits will receive P-EBT extension benefits if they:

- are still a California registered student;
- can be assumed to be attending school via virtual instruction; and
- are found to be eligible through the State’s data match program.

New P-EBT cards with additional P-EBT benefits will be mailed directly to families without the family having to apply online.

Children who are newly eligible for free or reduced-price school meals for the current 2020-21 school year are not eligible for P-EBT extension benefits. This includes children who just started school for the first time as a preschooler or kindergartener. Children newly eligible for free or reduced-price school meals for the current 2020-21 school year, will be served through the P-EBT 2.0 program described below.

There is no standard benefit amount under the P-EBT extension. Benefit amounts under the P-EBT extension are based on individual student and school level data. The total amount an individual child is eligible to receive depends on the start date of virtual instruction at the school the child attended during the 2019-20 school year and the number of assumed qualifying virtual instruction school days. Because the P-EBT extension benefit amount is based on each student’s learning situation, the benefit

amount will vary from student to student, perhaps even within a family. That said, P-EBT extension benefits will be provided based on the school meal reimbursement rate of \$5.86 per day for each qualifying virtual instruction school day. The maximum amount of P-EBT extension benefits an eligible child can receive is \$246.

More information about the P-EBT extension can be found at www.cdss.ca.gov/pandemic-ebt

P-EBT Cardholder Support

With the issuance of P-EBT extension benefits, CWDs will no longer be responsible for providing cardholder support to P-EBT cardholders. The P-EBT Helpline will provide ongoing cardholder support to all P-EBT 1.0 and P-EBT extension cardholders. To ensure a seamless transition of P-EBT cardholder support, a two-week transition period will be implemented. During this transition period, CWDs and the P-EBT Helpline will provide cardholder support simultaneously.

As of Monday, October 26, 2020, the P-EBT Helpline is active, initiating the transition period for P-EBT cardholder support. On Monday, November 9, 2020, the P-EBT Helpline will assume full responsibility for the provision P-EBT cardholder support.

During the transition period, CWD cardholder support responsibilities will not change. Both CWDs and the P-EBT Helpline will assist clients with PIN set-up and requests for a replacement P-EBT card.

P-EBT Helpline Cardholder Support

Accessing the P-EBT Helpline

The P-EBT Helpline is accessible via the California EBT Customer Service Center by calling (877) 328-9677.

If a P-EBT cardholder does not have their card number accessible, they must wait through two card number prompts without entering their P-EBT card number. They will then hear a prompt to report their card as having not yet arrived, or been lost, stolen, or damaged. After choosing that option, they will hear a prompt for help regarding P-EBT benefits. At that time, the caller can select the option specific to their P-EBT inquiry and connect with a phone agent for further assistance.

Requests for Pin Set-Up Support

Some P-EBT cardholders, after attempting to use the automated system to set-up their PIN, may require additional assistance. This may require P-EBT cardholder information to be updated in the system for cardholders to successfully PIN their card. P-EBT cardholders may contact the P-EBT Helpline for PIN set-up support.

Requests for a Replacement P-EBT Card

P-EBT cardholders may request a replacement P-EBT card. A request for a replacement card may be accepted in two scenarios: (1) a P-EBT cardholder reports a previously activated P-EBT card as lost or stolen or (2) the P-EBT card, though anticipated to be received via mail, was not received.

In either scenario, the P-EBT Helpline will look up the cardholder's P-EBT card information. After verifying the cardholder's information, the original card can be deactivated and a replacement P-EBT card can be issued to the cardholder's current mailing address. The replacement P-EBT card will reflect the balance remaining on the original card at the time of deactivation.

Other Requests

If a child is not found in the system, the P-EBT Helpline cannot assist with the request. The P-EBT Helpline cannot determine P-EBT eligibility or issue P-EBT benefits for P-EBT 1.0 or the P-EBT extension and the timeframe for appeals related to eligibility has expired.

P-EBT 2.0

Recently, states have been granted authority, pending federal approval, to provide eligible children P-EBT food benefits for the 2020-21 school year, including children attending qualifying child care. To provide P-EBT benefits for the 2020-21 school year, states must develop and submit a new P-EBT plan for federal approval. The CDSS and CDE are awaiting federal guidance and will be working collaboratively to develop and submit an approvable plan as soon as possible. More information will be shared as soon as it's available.

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the CalFresh Policy Bureau at (916) 651-8047.

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Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

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Family Engagement and Empowerment Division