

March 11, 2022

Governor Greg Gianforte
State Capitol, Room 204
PO Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620-0801

Director Adam Meier
111 North Sanders, Room 301
Helena MT 59620

Dear Governor Gianforte and Director Meier,

Thank you for your leadership 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 during this unprecedented time. We are grateful that Montana created and implemented a plan to issue benefits to all eligible students in each of the previous rounds that P-EBT was available, and to children from SNAP households under the age of six. But Montana is currently poised to miss out on benefits that would help students during the current school year, which in turn also will cause children to miss out on benefits in the summer of 2022.

Montana can provide school year 2021-2022 grocery benefits to children from low-income households through the Pandemic EBT program. Many states including Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada and Utah have either submitted a plan to USDA or indicated that they will submit a plan shortly for the 2021-2022 school year. The pandemic has only exacerbated the difficulties that struggling families face, particularly in rural states such as Montana, when they lose access to school meals. Providing school year benefits will not only serve students who are missing school due to COVID, but it will also allow all students from families on low incomes to access summer P-EBT benefits during the summer months of 2022.

Montana is one of only a handful of states that has not committed to providing School Year 2021-2022 benefits, and in turn Summer 2022 benefits.

P-EBT has been crucial to Montana families over the last year and a half. Many families have relied on benefits during times when COVID prevents them from accessing school meal programs. The same issue arises during the summer when it comes to accessing summer meal sites.

If Montana submits a School Year 2021-2022 plan, the state will be eligible to submit a summer 2022 plan as well. Without action, for just the summer of 2022, the state of Montana is poised to leave \$36.6 million in federal pandemic food assistance for hungry 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 state economy.

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 students with School Year 2021-2022 and eventually Summer 2022 P-EBT benefits. The hard work of the Department to provide P-EBT benefits for the spring of 2020, the school year of 2020-2021, and summer of 2021 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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Absarokee Area Food Bank
Alternative Energy Resources Organization
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Heart Association
Anaconda Ministerial Project Care
Beaverhead County Resource Assistance Center
Big Sky Lavender Farms
Billings Backpack Meals and Teen Pantry Programs
Breathing Room Counseling, LLC
Chouteau County Health Department
Community Food & Agriculture Coalition
Community Food Bank of Mineral County
Community Hope Inc.
Darby Bread Box
District 4 Human Resources Development Council
Eastern Montana Community Mental Health Center
Episcopal Diocese of Montana
Family Service
First Methodist Church Missoula, Mission & Outreach Team
Flathead Food Bank
Four Winds Ministries
Gallatin Valley Food Bank
Haven House
Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies – The Montana Coalition
Helena Food Share
HOPE Pantry
Hot Springs Food Pantry
Joliet Food Pantry
Land to Hand MT
LetThemComeHome
Libby Food Pantry, Inc.
Livingston Food Resource Center
Miles City Backpack Program
Meagher County Nutrition Coalition
Mission Valley Food Pantry

Missoula Food Bank & Community Center
Montana Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Montana Association of Christians
Montana Association of WIC Agencies
Montana Budget and Policy Center
Montana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Montana Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
Montana State University, Office of Health Advancement
Montana Women For...
Montana Women Vote
Neighbors Helping Neighbors
North Valley Food Bank
Partnership for Children
RE Services
Sanders County Coalition for Families
Seeley-Swan Community Food Bank
SEIU 775
Sincerely Paul Feeding His Sheep
St Vincent de Paul
Teton County Food Pantry
The River of Hope Food Bank
Trout Creek Senior Citizens, Inc.
Twin Bridges-MT Farmers Market and Food Pantry
Valley Community Emergency Food Bank, Inc.
Vineyard Mercy Ministry

Cc:

Charlie Brereton, Chief of Staff, MT DPHHS

Gene Hermanson, Administrator, Human and Community Services Division, MT DPHHS

Erica Johnston, Economic Security Services Executive Director, MT DPHHS

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