



Critical Food Initiatives for Ohio's Children

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Food insecurity across the United States has drastically increased both here in Ohio and across the country. From March to June, the number of Ohioans who reported that they “sometimes or often did not have enough to eat” rose by 30%, a number that will likely continue to increase as families lose unemployment benefits and are offered no additional relief. [No Kid Hungry](#) reports that prior to the Pandemic, 1 in 7 kids in the United States lived with hunger, but as schools and businesses close and budgets are stretched thin, that number could rise to 1 in 4 children. 1 in 7 children is too many, 1 in 4 is appalling. We have the tools to fight hunger, we need action.

The Pandemic-EBT Program, authorized by the Coronavirus Relief Act, has been shown to reduce food insecurity.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act provided support for families and children, including approving a Pandemic-EBT program. Almost every state submitted a plan and has been approved to operate a P-EBT program in their state. A newly released [report](#) from the Brookings Institute analyzed the P-EBT program across the country, and concluded that the program made a significant impact on child food security.

Specifically, the report looked at the impact of P-EBT on three outcome metrics: (1) food insecurity; (2) whether the household reports members sometimes or often do not have enough to eat; and (3) whether children in the household do not have enough to eat. The study found that during the first week after P-EBT benefits were paid, the rates of children reported as not getting enough to eat declined by up to 11 percentage points. As time passes from the date of the P-EBT issuance and looking into the second week, when these additional P-EBT resources may have been used up, the impact of the P-EBT funds declines. Importantly, the study notes that P-EBT lifted “at least 2.7-3.9 million children out of hunger.”

Another [analysis](#) focusing on the P-EBT program in Michigan, the first state to be approved for a P-EBT program by the USDA, found that P-EBT successfully reduced food insecurity among Michigan families. The authors also found that the program allowed families to afford healthier food options. Importantly, the report also looks at program implementation and drew the following policy recommendations for P-EBT operation in the future, including:

- States should extend P-EBT into the next school year given that some school districts have already decided to go online or use a hybrid model.
- Congress should provide additional resources to help states improve their technical and data infrastructure to implement the program more effectively.
- Congress should reduce administrative requirements going forward to make the program more accessible for both states and families.



- Congress should increase P-EBT benefits and SNAP benefits overall to ensure families can afford to put food on the table.

In Michigan, P-EBT has “[meant everything](#)” and proven to be “[a lifeline](#)” for families.

The same is likely true for Ohio. In Ohio, the P-EBT program, administered by ODJFS, provided up to \$302.00 to students eligible for free or reduced-priced meals, pumping \$254 million directly into our economy. Through the hard work of our state agencies to get the Pandemic-EBT program up and running, 501,000 P-EBT cards went out to Ohio families and over 80% of these cards have been activated.

The P-EBT program works to decrease hunger and with some school districts announcing they will be entirely virtual for the first semester, Congress must extend the P-EBT program to provide continued relief to children and families. Congress can also boost SNAP benefits and make every child eligible for free meals for the 2020-2021 school year, and effort sure to raise food security measures.

The Pandemic Child Hunger Prevention Act will help nourish our children

Representative Marcia Fudge was integral in ensuring the P-EBT program was included in the Coronavirus Relief Act and has become a champion for child nutrition. She recently introduced the [Pandemic Child Hunger Prevention Act](#). If passed, this legislation would make *all* students temporarily (during the 2020-2021 school year) eligible for free school meals through the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program. These meals could be provided at school or for those remote learning schools, through a grab and go or meal delivery service. School districts would be able to serve all children without the administrative burdens of having to certify each individual child’s eligibility. In addition, the legislation allows schools and non-profit partners to serve afterschool meals and snacks under the Child and Adult Care Food Program or National School Lunch Programs Afterschool Snack Program, without having to certify eligibility of each child.

Without congressional action and additional support, schools may be forced to lay off and discontinue participation in federal school meal programs. In Ohio, for example, some school meal program directors are reporting significant funding losses, up to [\\$2.35 million](#) in larger districts, causing a significant strain on the sustainability of the program. Moreover, the administrative hurdles that staff much jump through to certify eligibility presents another barrier for many of our hungry children.

The federal government must address the growing food insecurity in our country and so far, the proposed HEALS Act falls flat. There are proven solutions, such as a SNAP boost of 15%, an extension of the P-EBT program, and supporting the Pandemic Child Hunger Prevention Act. No child should go hungry and we must all do whatever it takes to protect children.