



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
Office of the Commissioner

S. Duke Storen
Commissioner

October 27, 2021

Memorandum

TO: The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable Luke E. Torian, Chair
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Janet D. Howell, Chair
Senate Finance & Appropriations

Daniel Timberlake, Director
Department of Planning & Budget

FROM: S. Duke Storen 

SUBJECT: TANF Summer Pilot Program

The 2020 General Assembly appropriated \$5,240,499 from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant to operate a one-year summer nutrition assistance pilot. The intent of the pilot was to provide a \$50 benefit each month from June–August to families with eligible children who live in communities that do not offer summer feeding programs. The agency was to report on pilot performance, monthly expenditures, and other details. However, as a response to the pandemic, the federal government funded a pandemic EBT program that provided a nutrition assistance benefit to all eligible children during the same timeframe and at a higher benefit level than our state pilot. For this reason, we did not implement the pilot project and do not have the requested evaluation and data.

In March 2020, Congress passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because many schools were closed due to the pandemic, the FFCRA established a Pandemic - Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program. The P-EBT program is a temporary emergency nutrition assistance program that provides benefits to families

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for children who would have received free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Act and were now learning in a virtual or hybrid environment. Initially intended to assist eligible families through the 2019-20 school years, subsequent federal legislation expanded and extended P-EBT into the summer and expanded benefits to children under the age of six whose families were receiving SNAP.

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) implemented the P-EBT program, distributing benefits for each month schools were closed or operating at reduced hours. During the summer of 2021, regardless of the availability or participation in summer meal sites, VDSS provided P-EBT benefits to all eligible children in the Commonwealth. Because the scope and reach of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funded P-EBT program provided assistance to all eligible children in Virginia instead of a much smaller and geographically select few that may have qualified for the summer feeding pilot VDSS provided benefits through P-EBT only. Each child received a benefit of \$375 for the summer. This benefit was distributed to 639,161 children across the Commonwealth. The cumulative school year benefit for these children was an average of \$860. The combined P-EBT benefit per child averages \$1,235.

The P-EBT program will continue during school year 2021-2022. Senate Bill 1303 mandates that all schools offer 180 days of in-person instruction to each student during the school year. Although this will decrease the number of students eligible for P-EBT, VDSS will work in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education to identify students that will be eligible if their school is closed or operating at reduced hours because of COVID-19. Students that do not have access to school meals will receive P-EBT benefits. This ensures students will have that safety net usually provided through school meals. On the federal level, the P-EBT program will end with the expiration of the current public health emergency unless there is a statutory change.

During the 2021 General Assembly session, VDSS requested to transfer this appropriation from fiscal year 2021 to fiscal year 2022 because the planned one-year pilot was not implemented due to P-EBT. This appropriation request was not approved. We will continue to pursue options to conduct a summer feeding pilot aimed at addressing summer hunger for children who do not have access to a summer feeding program.