

Summer EBT Policy Alert June 2024

Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) Lessons for Ensuring a Successful *Summer EBT* Program

Summer EBT (also known as SUNBUCKS) is here with \$2.5 billion for eligible families! Publicity is the key to getting these dollars to families. The just ended Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program has important lessons for the recently launched Summer EBT. The final P-EBT distributions ended with hundreds of millions of dollars unclaimed. These dollars were returned to the Federal Government instead of the intended families struggling to make ends meet. This summer we can do better. If School Districts and other stakeholders widely publicize Summer EBT, to ensure all eligible families are aware of the program and its major changes, then Summer 2024 EBT will have maximum participation of eligible families. Also, the same P-EBT lessons will apply to Summer 2025 and all future years.

- 1. Around \$1 billion dollars were never claimed during the last P-EBT distributions (Summer 2022 and Summer 2023); the money was returned to the Federal Government instead of the struggling families it was intended to help.**

Chart 1: Summer 2022 P-EBT Cards Distribution¹

State	P-EBT Distribution	P-EBT Cards Distributed	P-EBT Cards Expunged	Percent Cards Expunged	Summer 2022 Expunged P-EBT Dollars
Arizona	Summer 2022	497,371	84,899	17%	\$33,195,509
California	P-EBT 3.0	4,927,106	648,689	13.1%	\$305,302,216
Massachusetts	Summer 2022	601,100	83,767	14%	\$32,752,897
Nebraska	Summer 2022	151,852	46,778	30.8%	\$18,290,198
New York	Summer 2022	2,319,000	547,747	23.6%	\$214,169,707
Texas	Summer 2022	2,814,808	114,682	4.0%	\$44,840,662

¹ Source: all data comes from FOIA letter responses from states listed in the chart: Arizona Dept. of Economic Security; California Department of Social Services, Florida Department of Children and Family Services, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Texas Health and Human Services Commission. California 3.0 includes child care and school year distributions made in 2022.

Explanation and analysis: Chart 1 shows the results of the FOIA requests for the Summer 2022 P-EBT distribution (worth \$391 per eligible child). The purpose of Chart 1 and Chart 2 is to offer a sampling of states spending. States included here were taken from FOIA requests made to individual states. Chart 2 shows the results of the FOIA requests for the Summer 2023 P-EBT distribution (worth \$120 per eligible child). Due to wrong addresses and minimal publicity, hundreds of thousands of eligible families never knew they had more P-EBT benefits coming to them².

Chart 2: Summer 2023 P-EBT Cards Distribution³

State	Summer 2023 P-EBT Cards Distributed	P-EBT Cards already expunged or at risk of expungement	Percent for P-EBT Cards already expunged or at risk of expungement	Summer 2023 expunged or at risk of expungement P-EBT Dollars
California	4,359,929	968,101	22.2%	\$116,172,120.
Florida	1,817,754	596,774.	32.8%	\$71,612,880.
Iowa	244,448	48,343	19.7%	\$5,801,160,
Louisiana	600,067	124,162	20.6%	\$15,491,760.
Massachusetts	564,000	91,581	16.2%	\$10,989,720.
New York	2,000,000	740,602	37%	\$88,807,440.
Nebraska	150,000	55,016	36.6%	\$6,601,920.
North Carolina	961,630	155,881	16.2%	\$18,706,560
Ohio	842,427	131,000	15.5%	\$15,960,000
South Carolina	536,918	71,912	13.3%	\$8,629,440

How the list of states was made: During the summer and fall of 2023, our company prepared two reports alerting stakeholders that hundreds of millions of P-EBT dollars may be at risk of expungement unless there is more publicity and targeted outreach. The money had been distributed onto the P-EBT cards, but the families had not spent even one dollar. This group of P-EBT cards are known as unclaimed. The goal was to generate publicity in each state so that families with unclaimed P-EBT cards would start spending. All families in these states had been issued a Summer 2023 benefit at least six months prior to the FOIA request. The families still had ample amount of time to start spending the unclaimed dollars. But due to

² The FOIA request to Missouri Department of Social Services revealed that for latest P-EBT distributions, a total of 309,915 cards issued; 24,869 cards were returned due to wrong addresses.

³ Louisiana, Nebraska and New York State cards distributed figure is from the Summer 2023 Plan submitted and approved by USDA-FNS. All other states supplied the cards distributed and spending dollar amounts in their FOIA response. Oklahoma FOIA only provided dollars distributed and expungement. California includes school year eligible households, homeschooled and private school families.

less than minimal publicity, hundreds of thousands of families never got the word on the latest P-EBT distributions. To get the actual P-EBT unclaimed cards figures in states where the dollars were still active, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) letters were sent out to 25 states. The purpose of the FOIA letters was to find out how many P-EBT dollars were still active and at risk of expungement. The FOIA letter responses uncovered hundreds of millions of P-EBT dollars sitting on the table waiting to be spent. Media outlets and anti-hunger organizations were contacted in each of these states to publicize the FOIA unclaimed benefits P-EBT data (see appendix). While almost all these dollars have now been returned to the Federal Government, the state-by-state P-EBT unclaimed dollar figures offer important lessons for Summer EBT.

2. **From Pandemic-EBT to Summer EBT, the main challenge is the same: getting the word out to eligible families. Here's why school districts are crucial to this task.** One of the most important lessons of P-EBT centers around school districts and individual schools. While state agencies are posting all of the pertinent information on their websites, with six or more pages of FAQ, how many people will go to website to study the information? How will families know to expect a new Summer EBT card in the mail or order a Replacement Card? School District personnel have the most important role to play here. Only a school district and its National School Free Lunch participating schools will have both the most current student/parent guardian contact information and the means to contact families using text, email or backpack flyers. School Districts can let eligible families know they have Summer EBT dollars coming to them and to be on the lookout for the state issued envelope in the mail. School Districts are a trusted source of information for families. Over the course of one school year, many families move. If the state agency has the wrong address, the family can still find out about the Summer EBT \$120 from the child's School District and then apply for the benefit or a Replacement Card.

3. **Summer EBT must be fully spent within 122 days; any money left on day 123 will be automatically removed.** Families will have only 122 days (four months) to spend the \$120. The small spending window will be the biggest challenge. Summer EBT is a sharp difference from SNAP or P-EBT program. For both of these programs, families have 274 days to start spending. If a family spent \$1 dollar, the clock would be reset for another 274 days. The Summer EBT program requires ALL dollars to be spent within 120 days. There is no resetting the clock. If a family leaves 30 dollars unspent, it will be removed on day 121. Once removed, it cannot be put back on the card. 30 days prior to the expungement deadline, states are required to send out a warning letter to families that have not begun spending.

When must Summer EBT benefits be expunged? The statute requires that expungement cannot be longer than 4 months. FNS has operationalized this by requiring benefits to be expunged 122 days from issuance. If benefits are provided through more than one issuance (e.g., monthly) expungement must occur 122 days from each issuance. Source: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sebt/faq-processors>

4. **States have a structural gap in communication that may result in a family losing the benefit.** There is a strong likelihood that thousands of eligible families will end up not spending the \$120 before the 122 days deadline for no other reason than they were not aware of the benefit. The main issue here is wrong addresses. Even under the best of circumstances, state agencies will not have a fully accurate database of home addresses for all eligible families. Reasons include people move during the school year

or the wrong address was entered the government agency. For example, the FOIA request to Missouri Department of Social Services revealed that for last P-EBT distributions, a total of 309,915 cards issued; 24,869 cards were returned due to wrong addresses. What happens to these families? Here is a scenario that could result in a family not spending the \$120 before the 122 day deadline kicks in. When a State agency issues the Summer EBT card and mails out the card- *the 122 day clock will start*. Most states will first send out a letter alerting the family that the Summer EBT card will be arriving in the mail shortly. Families that never received a State alert letter and/or the Summer EBT card in the mail will end up not spending the \$120 benefit within the 122 days requirement for one reason- they never knew the Summer EBT money was coming. Also, some states will be loading the \$120 Summer EBT benefit onto a P-EBT card. However, how many families kept their P-EBT because they were informed that a new program was in the works- Summer EBT?

The best remedy is a robust publicity and targeted outreach campaign from school districts, anti-hunger organizations, elected officials and other stakeholders. If a family hears about the Summer EBT program, they can call the state agency and get a replacement card sent to the correct address before the 122 days deadline. For example, here is a NYS-Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance [link](#) with instructions for NYS residents that need to get a Replacement Card. Every participating state has a website with instructions for ordering a Replacement Card.



Sources:

1. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/summer/sunbucks> [June 2024 Frequently Asked Questions](#)
2. **Nationwide Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) Spending Policy Report** [download pdf](#)
3. **New York State Summer Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) Payments Policy Report.** [download pdf](#)

4. The story of millions of unclaimed P-EBT dollars has been covered state by state in **New York, Ohio, Missouri, Oklahoma, Louisiana, South Carolina, Nebraska and California**. These articles are instructive for understanding and meeting the challenges for implementing a successful Summer EBT program in 2024 and future years.

- [As millions in pandemic food benefits expire in NYC, a new summer meals program approaches](#) by Julian Shen-Berro, ChalkbeatNY June 7 2024
- [Millions of dollars unclaimed in last year's child food aid program, with days before expiration](#) by Cindy Gonzalez, Nebraska Examiner June 6, 2024
- [Millions in South Carolina summer grocery aid will expire next month](#) by Skylar Laird. South Carolina Daily Gazette April 23, 2024
- [Wrong addresses likely to blame for 124,000 Louisiana kids missing pandemic food aid](#) by Greg LaRose Louisiana Illuminator. April 2, 2024
- [Oklahomans have \\$58 million in unexpended P-EBT funds, benefits near expiration](#) by Mckenzie Richmond, KTUL TV Tulsa March 14 2024
- [Time is running out for Oklahoma families to use millions in pandemic food benefits](#) by M. Scott Carter *The Oklahoman* February 28, 2024
- [90,000 Missouri kids are eligible for food aid they haven't claimed that's about to expire](#) by Clara Bates in the Missouri Independent and St. Louis Post Dispatch February 27, 2024
- [Pandemic-era summer food benefits still available for Ohio children](#) by Susan Tebben Ohio Capital Journal February 22, 2024
- [Rep. Jarrells Urges Immediate Action to Claim Unspent Pandemic Food Benefits](#)
- [16 million earmarked to feed Ohio kids will be wasted, unless families act soon](#) by Sean McDonnell Cleveland Plain-Dealer and Cleveland.com February 19, 2024
- [Se les está acabando el tiempo a las familias de NYC: millones en beneficios de comida por la pandemia podrían caducar el mes que viene](#) by Julian Shen-Berro ChalkbeatNY January 31, 2024
- [Clock is ticking for NYC families: Millions in pandemic food benefits may expire next month](#) by Julian Shen-Berro ChalkbeatNY January 22, 2024
- [Some NYC families struggle to use pandemic food benefits, as millions of dollars remain unspent](#) by Julian Shen-Berro ChalkbeatNY November 15, 2023
- [More than 90,000 NYC students haven't spent recent pandemic food benefits, data shows](#) by Julian Shen-Berro ChalkbeatNY October 20, 2023
- [More than 123K N.Y. food stamps for kids gone unused](#) by Kathleen Moore, Albany Times Union September 13, 2023
- [School meal funds from pandemic still available to needy families: Here's how to get them](#) by Diana Dombrowski. Lohud Westchester Rockland County Gannett Newspaper. Sept. 7, 2023

5. **NYS Sample: How to Order a Replacement Card instructions from NYS-Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.** Every Summer EBT participating state has its own set of instructions which are available on the state agency administering website.

NYS Residents: Ordering a Replacement Summer EBT Food Benefits Card

Replacement Summer EBT food benefits cards should only be requested when you no longer have the EBT card that your Summer EBT food benefits were issued to. Ordering a replacement card will not result in receiving your child's Summer EBT food benefits faster and, in some cases, may delay access to your child's benefits. Remember: P-EBT/Summer EBT food benefits cards are issued in the name of the child (not the parent).

Call the EBT customer service call center at 1-888-328-6399 to order a replacement Summer EBT Food Benefit card and follow these steps:

Choose a language.

- You will be asked for the 19-digit card number that was printed on the front of the EBT food benefits card you are replacing.
- If you do not have that number, press 1 to enter different security information to verify identity.
 - When asked for the cardholder's Social Security number, do NOT enter your child's Social Security number. You must enter **999-99-** and then the first 4 digits (the **2-digit month and 2-digit day-MM/DD**)—of your child's BIRTHDAY, to complete the 9-digit entry.
 - **For example**, if your child's date of birth is July 4, you would enter "999-99-0704" when asked for the child's Social Security number.
 - You will then be asked to enter the **child's** full 8-digit birthday (**MM/DD/YYYY**).
- Then, enter the 4-digit Personal Identification Number (PIN) you selected for the P-EBT Food Benefit card that you are replacing. If you did not previously create a PIN, or if you do not remember it, you can fill out a replacement card form at [Address Change/Replacement Card Request Form](#), or call 1-833-452-0096.
- You will then be asked to verify your address. Please listen closely to the **Street Number** portion of the address that the card will be mailed to. If this is part of your current address, then you can request the replacement card.
- If this is NOT your current address, hang up and go to [Address Change/Replacement Card Request Form](#) to provide your updated address and child's information. We will verify your information and, if everything looks OK, the replacement card will be issued automatically. Please allow 3-4 weeks to receive your new card. Do not submit more than one address update form. Using the online form is the fastest and easiest way to update your address.

Remember: Benefits expire 122 days after the date they are issued. Be sure to use your benefits soon after you receive them.