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Congress of the United States
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IN EUROPE (U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

August 4, 2020

The Honorable Bill Lee
Governor of the State of Tennessee
600 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Boulevard
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee,

We are extremely concerned to learn that Tennessee may forfeit \$60 million in federal funds from the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer program, or P-EBT, which was created to help low-income parents purchase food for their children.

The P-EBT program, which was created through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, allows children who are on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) free or reduced lunch program to receive extra food benefits. These benefits are especially critical since these children could not receive those meals when schools shut down earlier this year.

Households that already receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) automatically received the \$250 payments on their existing EBT cards. Tennessee families on free or reduced lunch not enrolled in the other two food assistance programs, however, are required to pass an additional application process before receiving P-EBT funds. We appreciate the fact that the state has extended the deadline multiple times already, but just one family that remains unenrolled is too many.

While the majority of states around the country have waived this application process and already sent P-EBT cards directly to families whose children receive reduced-price meals, Tennessee is surprisingly and disappointingly requiring families to take extra steps to apply for P-EBT by August 14, though the USDA has set a deadline of September 30 to distribute the funds.

According to a recent article on August 31, 2020, in *The Commercial Appeal*, this process has prevented thousands of families from receiving their rightfully deserved benefits. The article states: “Due to challenges the state has faced getting the parents of all 388,000 children who aren’t on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or TANF but are on reduced lunch to apply for the P-EBT program, Tennessee is on track to leave roughly \$60 million in federal funds on the table.”¹

This is appalling.

In the middle of a global pandemic, we find it very troubling that you would leave tens of millions of dollars on the table that could directly benefit and help our state’s needy families. We also find it concerning that you seemed to have actively taken steps to make it harder to distribute this critical assistance when the majority of states around the country, including many of our neighbors, have already disbursed this aid.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that aid has been withheld to Tennessee’s low-income families under your leadership. It is our hope that you will right this wrong, as you have done in the past with the Temporary Assistance Needy Families (TANF) program.

Therefore, we respectfully request that you immediately waive the application process for Tennessee families on free or reduced lunch not enrolled in SNAP or TANF and distribute P-EBT cards directly to families who children receive reduced-price meals. With the deadline quickly approaching once again, any remaining families should be automatically enrolled in this critical assistance program. This funding is use it or lose it, so why not use it all on the families that need it the most?

We appreciate your immediate attention to this important issue and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Jim Cooper
Member of Congress

¹ Allison, Natalie, “Tennessee may forfeit \$60M in food aid,” *Commercial Appeal*, https://memphiscommercialappeal-tn.newsmemory.com/?token=cb352f902fd57fa9efecba0b53011721&cnum=3716580&fod=111111STD-0&selDate=20200804&licenseType=paid_subscriber&