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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-4209

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND  
COOPERATION IN EUROPE (U.S.  
HELSINKI COMMISSION)

January 6, 2025

Governor Bill Lee  
Tennessee State Capitol, 1st Floor  
600 Dr. Martin L. King Jr. Blvd.  
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee,

I am writing to express concern about Tennessee's decision not to renew the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program for Children (Summer EBT) for Summer 2025 before the January 1, 2025, deadline. It is my understanding that Tennessee will forfeit a \$1.1 million grant to operate a program that fed almost 700,000 Tennessee children last year.

While I understand your office issued a statement claiming that the program was "established in the pandemic-era to supplement existing food assistance programs in an extraordinary circumstance" and that the program is "mostly duplicative," I urge your administration to reconsider. Congress's decision to make the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) a permanent summer program through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 reflects the bipartisan recognition of its success and necessity. Feeding our children is not just a matter of public policy—it is a moral imperative. Well-nourished children are better able to learn, grow, and lead healthy, well-adjusted lives.

This issue is especially pressing in Tennessee, where poverty rates remain unacceptably high, particularly in Memphis. According to the 2024 Vanderbilt Center for Child Health Policy, over 40% of Tennessee families report food insecurity—a crisis compounded in urban centers like Memphis, where many parents struggle to put food on the table for their children. These struggles have far-reaching consequences, contributing not only to hunger but also to social challenges such as increased crime. When children go hungry, families experience desperation that can drive crime and instability in our communities. Addressing child hunger is not just an

act of compassion. It is also a necessary step toward creating safer, more secure neighborhoods across our state.

As I stated in my earlier correspondence, my own Jewish faith teaches the philosophy of tikkun olam — repairing the world and making it a better place. Similarly, Matthew's Gospel reminds us, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me..." These teachings transcend religion and speak to our shared humanity and responsibility to care for one another. In the richest country in the world, it is a travesty that so many of our children go hungry.

Families across Tennessee are speaking out and making heartfelt appeals for the state to recognize their struggles and renew a program that has provided a lifeline to help combat food insecurity. By renewing the Summer EBT program, Tennessee has the opportunity to reduce child hunger, support working families, and strengthen our communities. I am confident that renewing this program aligns with the values we hold dear as Tennesseans.

Should the Tennessee Department of Human Services choose to move forward with its decision, I respectfully request an explanation by January 17, 2025, to share with my constituents, who deserve clarity and transparency on why these funds are being declined.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this urgent matter. I remain hopeful for a positive resolution and look forward to your prompt response.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,



Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress