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Office of the Governor  
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## “U.S. Department of Agriculture and Food and Nutrition Service approves American Samoa’s State Plan for Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer.”

*\$7.4 million for Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) Program for American Samoa’s School Children for School Year 2020-2021 and Summer of 2021*

Acting Governor Talauega E. V. Ale today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), has approved American Samoa’s State Plan to operate a Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) Program, for children who lost access to free meals at school from the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) due to closure or reduced attendance or hours of their schools during School Year (SY) 2020-2021, and for children who were eligible to receive free meals from the NSLP as of the end of SY 2020-2021.

In making the announcement, Acting Governor Talauega said, “I am very grateful to USDA’s Deputy Administrator for Child Nutrition Programs, Cynthia Long, and FNS Western Regional Administrator, Jesus Mendoza, for their continued support of American Samoa as demonstrated by the approval of our state plan to operate a P-EBT Program”. He continued, “I am informed that American Samoa is the last U.S. jurisdiction to be approved for P-EBT and for that I am very pleased as American Samoa’s school children who lost access to free meals at school during School Year 2020-2021 and over the summer months will receive P-EBT benefits similar to school children in the 50 states, D.C., and the other four territories”.

Under the approved state plan, the American Samoa Nutrition Assistance Program (ASNAP) Division of the Department of Human and Social Services (DHSS) will operate the program and issue P-EBT benefits in the form of food stamp coupons to households with children without access to free meals in school. The ASNAP and DHSS have the expertise,

experience, and delivery systems required for eligibility determination and issuance of food assistance benefits.

Households are required to complete an application to provide basic information for their children in order for them to receive P-EBT benefits. DHSS will use school data from the Department of Education and all the private schools to confirm the children's eligibility. P-EBT benefits are calculated at the rate of \$7.97 a day, which is equal to the daily reimbursement for a free breakfast, lunch, and snack.

DHSS estimates issuing \$1.3 million in P-EBT food coupons to approximately 11,100 children who lost access to free meals at school at the beginning of the school year when they were scheduled for virtual learning and an additional \$6.1 million in P-EBT food coupons to approximately 14,000 school children who lost access to free meals at school during the summer of 2021.

For the first part of the P-EBT Program, children are eligible if they would have received free meals at their schools through the NSLP if not for the closure or reduced attendance or hours of their schools for at least 5 consecutive days during SY 2020-2021. DHSS has established that children who attended the 22 public schools that had virtual days for grades 5 to 8 and 11 and 12 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and virtual days for kindergarten to grade 4 and grades 9 and 10 on Tuesdays and Thursdays from August 31, 2020, to October 9, 2020, qualify for 12 or 17 days of P-EBT benefits or \$96 and \$135 in food coupons respectively. Children who attended St. Theresa Elementary School who had virtual days every Friday from August 31 to December 18, 2020 qualify for 16 days or \$128 in food coupons, and children who attended Kanana Fou School who had virtual days from February 1-12, 2021 qualify for 10 days or \$80 in food coupons.

For the second part of the P-EBT Program, children who were eligible to receive free meals at school from the NSLP as of the end of the school year 2020-2021 qualify for the U.S. standard benefit of \$438 in food coupons for the 55 covered days of the summer of 2021.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127; the Act) as amended by the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and the Other Extensions Act (P.L. 116159) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260) authorized the continuation of a temporary assistance program for households with children affected by school closures during the public health emergency that was declared on January 27, 2020. The March 11, 2021, American Rescue Plan Act (the ARP, P.L. 117-2) extends P-EBT through the end of the public health emergency, a period that includes the summer of 2021. FNS's approval of American Samoa's state plan was made pursuant to the authority granted under Section 1101 of the Act.

DHSS will announce in the coming days and weeks how families may apply for P-EBT benefits with other pertinent information that includes the dates and locations where

applications will be accepted; timeline for the issuance of benefits; retail stores to use their food coupons and expiration dates of P-EBT benefits.

In conclusion, Acting Governor Talauega said, “On behalf of Governor Lemanu and the people of American Samoa, I extend my sincere appreciation to the USDA FNS leadership and staff at the national and regional levels, as well as DHSS Director Muavaefa’atasi John Suisala and staff for their continued support of nutrition assistance programs for low-income residents of American Samoa.”

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