

September 2020

Dear Governor Ricketts:

Nebraska should be doing more to address food insecurity among low-income households in our state. Despite our exceptionally low unemployment, the COVID-19 pandemic still negatively affects families in urban, suburban, and rural parts of Nebraska. Data, from just one month ago, show that Nebraska food insecurity has risen by as much as 23 percent among adults and 25 percent among households with children since before the pandemic.¹

As we continue to face historically unprecedented hardship as a country and as a state, we should be enacting policies that support those most in need. With that in mind, the undersigned Nebraska Senators urge you to: (1) re-open applications for Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) benefits, and (2) continue providing emergency Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) allotments as long as the public health emergency continues. Given the magnitude of food insecurity in our state, it is regrettable that Nebraska is the only state in the union that has not fully extended SNAP benefits. We senators and the citizens of Nebraska deserve an explanation.

Our Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Department of Education worked quickly to develop and implement our P-EBT program statewide in June and July. As a result of those efforts, over 52,000 children applied for P-EBT, out of a total of roughly 102,000 application-eligible children. To make up the gap between eligible children and those currently receiving the benefit, we have a rapidly closing opportunity to submit a P-EBT state plan amendment to USDA to re-open applications through September 15.

Likewise, Nebraska made use of SNAP maximum allotments since the Families First Coronavirus Response Act authorized this pandemic response option for states in March. Our state has taken up this option through the month of July and we understand that DHHS will no longer pursue maximum SNAP allotments moving forward. The USDA has made it clear that additional emergency allotments are still available to states. Nebraska should continue to request this flexibility to better support struggling Nebraskans like the 49 other states² that have continued to do so at least through August.

DHHS already expanded its enrollment capacity for new SNAP programs, so it would not be unduly burdened by extending the P-EBT and SNAP benefits named here. It must be noted that all of the aid and half of the administrative costs for these program extensions are supported entirely by the federal government. A wide variety of pandemic-related benefits have been made available to farmers, employers, their employees and taxpayers in general. Despite these forms of monetary assistance, the number of food insecure Nebraskans is undoubtedly higher since the start of the pandemic. Since federal assistance is available and is being widely used in this country, Nebraska should not withhold this life-sustaining aid to those residents who remain food insecure.

¹ See Table 5, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp12.html>

² <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/covid-19-emergency-allotments-guidance>

Nebraska is still not back to normal after the devastation brought on by COVID-19. In fact, the numbers, as well as stories from our constituents across the state, say that we still have a long way to go. As Nebraska's economy recovers and families get back on their feet, these actions would provide essential aid at a time of great need and return millions of additional federal dollars of economic stimulus back to our state.

Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented crisis. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Senator Carol Blood
District 3



Senator Anna Wishart
District 27



Senator Matt Hansen
District 26



Senator Kate Bolz
District 29



Senator Steve Lathrop
District 12



Senator Tony Vargas
District 7



Senator Megan Hunt
District 8



Senator Sue Crawford
District 45



Senator John McCollister
District 20



Senator Dan Quick
District 35



Senator Sara Howard
District 9



Senator Wendy DeBoer
District 10



Senator Justin Wayne
District 13



Senator Michaela Cavanaugh
District 6



Senator Mike McDonnell
District 5



Senator Lynne Walz
District 15



Senator Rick Kolowski
District 31



Senator Patty Pansing Brooks
District 28



Senator Adam Morfeld
District 46



Senator Ernie Chambers
District 11

