
Colorado to implement new summer food access program in 2024

State lawmakers pass bill to further reduce hunger for school-age children

DENVER (Nov. 21, 2023) – Colorado children, especially those in rural communities, will have more access to adequate, nutritious foods next summer, thanks to the actions of state lawmakers and advocates during the special legislative session.

After advancing from both the Senate and House of Representatives, [Senate Bill 23B-002](#) will be signed into law by Governor Polis sometime next week. The legislation supports Colorado in implementing a new federally funded program for school-age children and their families to purchase needed groceries during the summer months.

“This is an important investment in the future for young Coloradans,” said Anya Rose, senior public policy manager for Hunger Free Colorado. “During a time of high inflation and food costs, Summer EBT will help insulate children from the economic uncertainties their families may face. It will do so in a way that supports families’ ability to make choices about how they nourish themselves while generating economic activity across the state.”

Over summer break, K-12 students lose access to breakfasts and lunches typically served during the school day. This often puts an additional strain on household budgets, which are already tight due to low wages, rising costs of living and other life storms. Studies show that a lack of access to healthy foods can impact the health and well-being of growing children and teenagers, as well as their ability to focus, learn, and excel in school.

“Having access to food is not a reality for all kids living in Colorado; in fact, one in nine kids face hunger,” said Rep. Lorena Garcia, one of the bill’s co-sponsors in the House. “Child hunger gets worse during the summer months, and our important legislation utilizes federal funding to help hard-working families put food on the table. Many families see their grocery bill skyrocket during the summer, and by leveraging federal funds we can combat child hunger so every kid has the chance to be their best.”

The [Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer program](#) (Summer EBT) aims to provide nutrition assistance for school-age children who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. States that opt-in for 2024 will be able to tap into federal funds and provide \$40 per month for each eligible child this coming summer. Households will receive pre-loaded funds on a debit-like card to buy groceries at stores accepting SNAP benefits.

Since the daily benefits only equate to about \$1.33 per child, this new program will be in addition to [summer meal sites](#) that offer breakfasts, lunches, and snacks to any youth under 18 years old.

The state legislature prioritized this matter during the special session since Colorado must commit to allocating state funds and meeting federal deadlines early next year to begin offering these benefits in 2024; otherwise, the program would have to be postponed until 2025.

“Far too many Colorado children, through no fault of their own, face nutritional challenges every day,” said Senator Rachel Zenzinger, one of the Senate bill’s co-sponsors. “Hunger becomes exacerbated in the summer when they are not in school and they don’t have access to free and reduced meals. We owe it to those children to leverage any resources we can on their behalf, and these federal funds provide a step in the right direction.”

The Summer EBT bill was sponsored by Senators Rachel Zenzinger (D-Arapahoe County) and Jeff Bridges (D-Arapahoe County), along with Representatives Lorena Garcia (D-Unincorporated Adams County) and Shannon Bird (D-Westminster). It was supported by a coalition of organizations led by Hunger Free Colorado and the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger.

The legislation appropriates \$3.5 million in state funds to begin administering Summer EBT in 2024. It also included one amendment to support community-based organizations, particularly across rural areas of Colorado, in conducting local outreach about the new program.

“We’re immensely grateful to our governor, state lawmakers, and partnering organizations for prioritizing Summer EBT,” said Greta Allen, policy director for the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger. “By providing consistent access to nutritious food throughout the year, we can ensure Colorado students thrive in and out of the classroom.”

By opting in, Colorado will receive an estimated \$35 million in federal funds that will support more than 300,000 children across the state. Summer EBT will be administered by the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Department of Education.

###