



**THE FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**House Democratic Office**

402 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

[MyFloridaHouse.gov/FLHouseDems.com](http://MyFloridaHouse.gov/FLHouseDems.com)

August 13, 2024

The Honorable Ron DeSantis  
400 South Monroe Street, The Capitol  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

The Honorable Shevaun Harris  
Florida Department of Children and Families  
2415 North Monroe Street, Suite 400  
Tallahassee, FL 32303

The Honorable Wilton Simpson  
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
400 South Monroe Street, The Capitol  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Via Email

Dear Governor DeSantis, Secretary Harris, and Commissioner Simpson:

We are writing to express our concern that the State of Florida has not yet indicated that it will participate in the 2025 Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (Summer EBT) program. The Summer EBT food assistance program was authorized by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 to combat food insecurity among low-income children, and in the 37 states currently participating approximately \$2.6 billion in federal food assistance benefits are being distributed to help protect an estimated 21.3 million children from food insecurity.

While Florida, unfortunately, was one of 13 states that decided not to participate in the 2024 Summer EBT program, there is still time to take advantage of this win-win opportunity next summer and help the one in five children in Florida affected by hunger, while boosting the state economy with an estimated \$466 million economic impact.

The August 15, 2024, deadline for notifying our federal partners of Florida's intent to participate in the 2025 Summer EBT program is rapidly approaching. The Florida

House Democratic Caucus strongly urges you to act to secure our state's share of the federal funding available to help reduce summer hunger in Florida, and help ensure that children return to school in the Fall of 2025 well-nourished and ready to learn.

The 2025 Summer EBT program is an opportunity for Florida to receive an estimated \$259 million in federal funding to provide grocery assistance to over 2 million children of low-income Floridians during the summer months, when school meal programs are unavailable. Florida would only be required to contribute approximately \$13 million in state funds to cover half of the costs of administering the program, which represents a tiny fraction — just .08 percent — of the state's projected \$17 billion budget surplus for the 2024-2025 state fiscal year.

To date, Florida Department of Children & Families (DCF) officials have indicated in media reports that the state does not intend to participate in the 2025 Summer EBT program due to concerns over “federal strings attached” to the additional funding. While it is unclear what exactly DCF's concerns are in reference to, it is worth noting that during the height of the COVID pandemic Florida — specifically DCF and the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS) — worked with our federal partners to successfully implement the Pandemic EBT program, which was essentially a temporary, larger version of Summer EBT. Presumably, the state should be able to leverage this experience to implement the 2025 Summer EBT program with relatively routine planning and administrative effort. Additionally, we urge the executive branch to take advantage of the logistical support offered by 185 community and faith-based organizations in their May 1, 2024, letter to Governor and DCF urging the state to participate in the 2025 Summer EBT program.

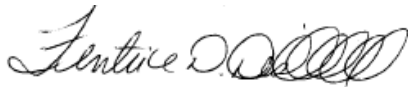
Regarding any potential fiscal concerns, as Governor DeSantis frequently — and correctly — reminds Floridians, the state's fiscal situation is strong, as evidenced by a massive \$17 billion budget surplus. We cannot conceive of any reasonable arguments against investing less than one-tenth of one percent (.076 percent) of the state's budget surplus to secure an exponential return in federal funding dedicated to feeding Florida children. In fact, the legislature has already expressed support for participating in the 2025 Summer EBT program. The implementing bill for the 2024-25 General Appropriations Act — which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support — includes a specific reference to the Summer EBT program and explicitly authorizes DCF to submit a budget amendment for increased budget authority to support the program (Chapter 2024-228, Laws of Florida, HB 5003, Section 20).

To be clear, if Florida participates in Summer EBT the federal government will fully fund 100% of the estimated \$259 million in food assistance benefits distributed to Floridians. Florida would only be required to contribute funding for 50% of the program's administrative costs, with the state's share estimated to be just \$13 million. Put another way — based on real-world experience in participating states — it is projected that for every dollar in state funding Florida contributed to administering the Summer EBT program, Florida families with an eligible child would receive twenty dollars in federal funding to purchase food from Florida's grocery stores, farmer's markets, and other businesses. The \$259 million in new federal funding available for Florida through Summer EBT would not only help feed over 2 million children, it would do so while directly boosting the revenue of Florida businesses and — due to the well-established multiplier effect — produce \$466 million in economic impact to our state.

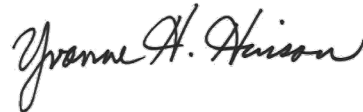
Summer often means beach trips and cook-outs for many Floridians, but for far too many of their neighbors' summer is a time of financial hardship. With the National School Lunch Program unavailable over the summer, parents trying to balance tight household budgets struggle to afford the cost of additional food needs with other necessities such as rent, transportation, phone and electrical bills. During these months many community food banks, food pantries in houses of worship, and other nonprofit emergency food providers experience significant increases in demand that they often have difficulty meeting. Florida's other existing food programs provide critical assistance, but have been shown to lack the capacity to meet the summer spike in need due to the absence of school meals. The Summer EBT program is specifically designed to fill this gap, and has already demonstrated its effectiveness in doing so in states across the nation.

The Florida House Democratic Caucus urges you to seize this significant opportunity to help children in Florida thrive and grow — free from hunger or the looming fear of it — by submitting notification to the United States Department of Agriculture of Florida's intent to participate in the 2025 Summer EBT program. We also respectfully request that DCF provide a more substantive and detailed explanation within the next 30 days of the concerns they may have regarding Florida's participation, so that we can work together with our federal partners to resolve potential issues. We are sure that Florida's executive branch ultimately shares our Caucus's belief that bureaucratic barriers, administrative anxiety, or status quo stagnation should not stand in the way of efforts to ensure every Floridian has the freedom to be healthy, prosperous, and safe.

Respectfully,



Representative Fentrice Driskell  
Florida House District 67  
Florida House Democratic Leader



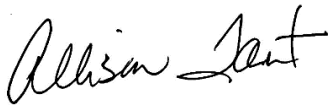
Representative Yvonne Hayes  
Hinson  
Florida House District 21



Representative Gallop Franklin II  
Florida House District 8



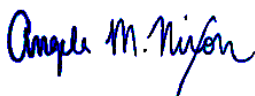
Representative Tom Keen  
Florida House District 35



Representative Allison Tant  
Florida House District 9



Representative LaVon Bracy Davis  
Florida House District 40



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Representative Felicia Simone  
Robinson  
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Representative Dotie Joseph  
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Representative Ashley V. Gantt  
Florida House District 109



Representative Kevin D. Chambliss  
Florida House District 117