

Advocacy Update 1.25.2021



What a start to 2021 for Anti-Hunger advocates!?! This is a long update because last week seemed to be a month full of exciting information! Grab a cup of coffee now.

Federal response to hunger

Two Executive Orders signed by the President

These orders did a number of things:

Supports Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) for children and families

- Asks the USDA to increase P-EBT benefits.

P-EBT is a program that is meant to help parents, who have children who receive free or reduced school lunches, who have lost those meals due to the pandemic, receive funds to subsidize those meals.

It worked efficiently and uncomplicated in the spring of 2020 because almost all schools were closed in response to COVID-19 outbreaks.

For summer/fall/current times it becomes a bit more complicated. Households are eligible to receive \$5.86 per child per day of school missed (pre-15% increase), but how do schools quickly and accurately calculate which and how many children were in school, and does personal choice factor into the decision.

Guidance has been given but is still being sorted out at the State level.

Increased SNAP for the lowest-income households

- Asks to the government to issue guidance on how states can increase their SNAP emergency allotments (aka maximum benefits) for the lowest-income households.

During the pandemic SNAP households have been issued emergency allotments, raising the benefit levels for all SNAP households up to the maximum benefits allowed.

While that helps households who have lower SNAP benefits due to income deductions or other benefit lowering considerations, this process does not help the lowest-income households (estimated 40% of households).

These households have seen no increase in SNAP benefits because they were already receiving the maximum benefit payments.

Which leads us into changing the Thrift Food Plan...

Review guidance for using the Thrifty Food Plan

- Asks to revise the Thrifty Food Plan. ([What is the Thrifty Food Plan?](#))

- o There are 4 plans used by the USDA, the four are Thrifty, Low, Moderate, Liberal...the Thrifty Food plan exercises minimal food costs
- o The Thrifty Food Plan is used to calculate SNAP benefits for households, while the other higher priced food plans are used to create military meal plans or child custody support costs.
- o [The Thrifty Food Plan](#) has not been revisited for 15 years
- o The 4 different plans reflect 4 different food choices, the Thrifty Food Plan being the most restrictive, impractical, unrealistic, and ignores dietary needs, yet is how we determine SNAP benefit allowances to our most vulnerable families and seniors.
- o To set the cost of each of the food plans the USDA creates "baskets of food" from a grocery store with unrealistic package sizes (example a weekly thrifty food basket contains .02lbs of bacon or lunchmeats for adult males...that is 1.5 slices of bacon or .75 slices of bologna).
- o We are grateful that this plan will finally be revisited and updated

SNAP rule making

The previous administration has withdrawn two proposed rules that would have made changes to [categorical eligibility](#) and the Standard Utility Allowance. We want to thank all advocates and partner agencies who left comments in the federal register back in July-September, advocacy works and we appreciate your efforts!

Budget Reconciliation is fast approaching

Remember in the last update we discussed the process of Budget Reconciliation? Senator Bernie Sanders has announced that they will use the Budget Reconciliation process to get the next COVID-19 relief bill through Congress. This process will allow the package to pass with only 51 votes and not 60. Republicans have already stated that while there are many parts of the new relief package they support, there are some parts they cannot get behind with its large \$1.9 trillion price tag.

However, the Biden administration has stated they want to pursue the bill through regular order and not through the reconciliation process.

Feeding America has released their priorities they'd like to see in next stimulus package

- Increase the adequacy and duration of SNAP benefits by at least 15 percent for the duration of the pandemic and economic recovery.
- Provide \$900 million for food purchases through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) to help food banks meet emergency need in communities across the country.
- Invest \$543 million in the infrastructure of our nation's charitable food system. This funding will allow food banks and partner distribution organizations in every state to better serve their communities by helping to address the severe shortage of vehicles, refrigerators and freezers across the network.
- Increase funding and provide adequate flexibility to ensure Child Nutrition programs like Pandemic EBT can continue serving children in need through the summer and during future school closings.

Texas State Legislature

This year going into the 87th Texas State Legislature we have three main priorities:

FYI from the Legislature - *"We will convene on Tuesday, January 26 at 1 PM and plan to convene on Wednesday, January 27 at 10 AM. It is our intention to adjourn until the following Tuesday, February 2."* -

*the Office of the Speaker**Increase access to SNAP benefits for Senior Citizens and People with Disabilities*

We will be advocating for implementing a simplified application process and for allowing households composed solely of seniors and/or persons with a disability with no earned income to be certified for 36 months using a shortened application form with limited documentation requirements. We also propose using data matching with Medicaid to identify seniors that are eligible but not enrolled in SNAP.

Current Standing: [SB 224](#) filed by Senator Perry (R) & Senator West (D) ; [HB 701](#) filed by Representative Walle (D)

Eliminate the Vehicle Asset Test for the SNAP application process

Having a car counts against you when applying for SNAP. The current vehicle asset limits are \$15,000 for the first vehicle and \$4,650 for any subsequent vehicle. Any vehicles valued over this begin to reduce the amount of benefits you can receive each month. Anyone who has participated in a car-line food distribution can tell you, cars should not limit your ability to access food. Removing the test entirely is the simplest and most straightforward option. For reference, [43 states/U.S. territories have relaxed their vehicle asset limits](#), including 38 that have abolished them completely. Texas is among the five states that have relaxed the limit, but not fully abolished it. It is time for Texas to take this next step.

Current Standing: We fully support [HB 1230](#) filed by Representative Ortega (D)

Protect the Surplus Agricultural Product Grant that was partially cut when Department's needed to reduce their overall spending budgets.

Update: The Senate base budget bill includes full funding of the Surplus Agriculture Products Grant to offset the costs of harvesting, gleaning and transporting agricultural products to Texas food banks. The House recommended bill, which has not been filed, also contains the full funding for the program.

Continued advocacy is needed to ensure this base bill becomes the final budget.

ACTION REQUESTED: Please participate in the Day of Action on Wednesday, January 27th to advocate for funding for this grant program.

On Wednesday, January 27th there will be a kick-off call from 9:00 – 10:00 AM to thank everyone for participating and answer any last-minute questions that may arise. We encourage everyone that is participating in the Day of Action to join this meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82781756971>

Wednesday morning, I will be sending out talking points and other material for you to use to contact your legislature members. I hope you will be able to join the Texas Anti-Hunger advocacy network for this day of action.

Additional priority: College hunger – anti-hunger advocates are working on a bill to expand access to SNAP for college students. A draft bill is in the works and we hope to share a filed bill soon!

Learning Opportunity

Join UnidosUS, UnidosUS Affiliate MAUC, Every Texan and Texas State Representative Lina Ortega January 28, 2021 at 9am for a timely policy roundtable on food insecurity in Texas Hispanic children and families. They will discuss state policy and system changes that would remove barriers and increase access to

federal nutrition programs and ensure all Texas children and families have access to nutritious food.
[Register and submit questions here.](#)

Online grocery shopping

Though being told to stay home and stay safe, and purchase groceries online, many households simply cannot do this. [Read about it here.](#)



Questions or Comments? Hit reply!

[Fun bill time.](#) HB 928 Only catfish will be allowed to be sold as Catfish. As a lover of fried catfish (cornmeal batter only please) I'm horrified and am afraid to question why this bill is needed.

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Don't want these updates any longer?

Email policy@ntfb.org and let me know, I'll remove you quickly but remorsefully...