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## **Tennessee Blocks \$80 Million in Federal Food Assistance, Leaving the Majority of Tennessee Children Without Support**

**NASHVILLE, TN – February 20, 2025** – On February 14, 2025, the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) announced that the state will spend \$3 million to implement a limited version of the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) program, providing food assistance to children in just 15 counties. This decision excludes at least 675,000 children across 80 counties who will not receive critical support to help pay for groceries during the summer months as food prices continue to rise.

Instead of opting into the federal S-EBT program, which would have leveraged over \$80 million in federal funds to assist families across the state, Tennessee has chosen an inefficient and costly alternative. The state's version of the program will cost Tennessee approximately \$120 per child, compared to the federally funded program's cost of just \$6 per child.

“The state acknowledges that low-income families need support affording food in the summer, but its response is woefully inadequate,” said Signe Anderson, Senior Director of Nutrition Advocacy at Tennessee Justice Center. “Instead of serving 700,000 Tennessee children through Summer EBT, TDHS’s program will reach a max of 25,000 children. Despite spending nearly as much as it would take to serve the entire state, the Tennessee program will reach less than 4% of the children that received Summer EBT in 2024.”

This decision is fiscally irresponsible and unjust. Gov. Lee is blocking Tennessee taxpayer dollars from returning to Tennessee families. Meanwhile, other states participating in Summer EBT, from New York to our southern neighbors, will benefit from the Tennessee taxpayer dollars that Gov. Lee is leaving on the table.

A recent [poll](#) by Change Research and No Kid Hungry found that “86% of adults statewide would like Tennessee to continue participating in Summer EBT”. Yet, despite overwhelming support, the state has chosen an inefficient and restrictive approach that benefits only a fraction of Tennessee children.

### **Breaking Down the Impact:**

- **The state recognizes the need for Summer EBT but chooses to exclude children in 80 of 95 Tennessee counties.**
- **Even in the 15 counties the program will serve, children who receive reduced-price school meals will not be eligible for this program.**
- **Of the children who received Summer EBT in 2024, less than 4% will receive benefits through the Tennessee program this summer, despite the availability of federal funds.**
- **The state’s limited program costs nearly as much to operate in just 15 counties as it would to serve the entire state through the federal program.**
- **Tennessee taxpayer dollars are being blocked from supporting local families, while other states—both red and blue—use those funds to help their children.**

Who in state leadership looked at this plan and thought it was a good deal for Tennessee families?

“This isn’t about whether we should invest in feeding children—we all agree on that,” said Anderson. “It’s about whether we do it in the most effective and compassionate way possible. Tennessee had a chance to do the right thing and chose pointless cruelty instead.”

Tennessee families deserve better. We urge state leaders to reconsider their decision and opt in to the federal S-EBT program for summer 2026 to ensure all eligible children have access to the food they need next summer. The state has missed the deadline to participate for summer 2025 and Tennessee families will suffer the consequences because of it.

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### **[About Tennessee Justice Center / www.tnjustice.org](http://www.tnjustice.org)**

For over 28 years, the Tennessee Justice Center has been standing with vulnerable Tennessee families and helping them access basic necessities of life. Since opening our doors in 1996, TJC has used lawsuits, legislation and coalition building to overcome injustice, winning \$2 billion in health care and hundreds of millions in financial and nutrition assistance for Tennesseans. Aside from lawsuits, TJC helps assist seniors and other individuals with TennCare, SNAP, and other public benefit programs.