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May 11, 2020

(TRENTON) – Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson today announced the federal government has approved the Department’s plan to provide \$248 million in special food assistance benefits to nearly 600,000 New Jersey children who normally receive free or reduced-price school meals as part of the response to COVID-19 school closures.

“We are doing everything we can to ensure people throughout New Jersey have access to food assistance during this difficult time, especially children,” Commissioner Johnson said. “Children should never go hungry, and approval of our plan is another step forward in our fight against hunger amid COVID-19.”

Under the plan approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, New Jersey special Pandemic-EBT benefits will be provided to recipients of the state’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and non-SNAP households with children who normally receive free or reduced-price school meals.

With federal approval, the Department will begin implementing the plan. The plan will provide each eligible student with \$416.10 to help with nutritional support during the time that schools have been closed during the pandemic. No application is necessary to receive this benefit. Human Services is working with schools to identify students who were receiving free or reduced school meals. Eligible students already participating in SNAP will receive the Pandemic-EBT on their household’s existing Families First card. All other Pandemic-EBT eligible households will be mailed a P-EBT card. Human Services expects these benefits to be issued no later than June.

“No child should go hungry, and this program will help ensure New Jersey children will get the nutrition they need,” Human Services Deputy Commissioner Elisa Neira said. “We’ve been working hard to boost access to food assistance during this difficult time. This is a crucial step toward meeting that goal.”

NJ SNAP provides money directly to individuals and families who need help affording groceries. Funds are directly loaded onto an electronic benefits card each month, and SNAP is accepted at most grocery stores and bodegas.

Besides receiving approval of the Pandemic-EBT plan, Human Services has:

- Distributed an extra \$106 million in additional benefits to SNAP recipients since the start of the emergency.
- Ensured that everyone whose benefits were up for renewal in March and April, or are due in May or June were extended for six months. This means nobody’s SNAP benefits will be ended during these extensions for not completing the renewal.
- Made it easier to apply for SNAP during this emergency by waiving the normally required interview and the hard copy signature on applications, so as to reduce the need for face-to-face interactions.

“We continue to urge residents to visit njhelps.org to learn more and apply for food assistance and other benefits,” said Human Services Assistant Commissioner Natasha Johnson, who directs the Division of Family Development that oversees NJ SNAP. “We also continue to appreciate the dedicated staff at the County Boards of Social Services who are essential to getting these critical services to New Jersey families.”

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