

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 29, 2020

Department of Human Services Warns Pennsylvanians of Potential Scam Involving Pandemic EBT Benefits

Harrisburg, PA – The Department of Human Services (DHS) is warning of a possible scam concerning Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) benefits and reminding Pennsylvanians to be skeptical of unsolicited or random calls or text messages about public-assistance programs – especially when the calls or text messages solicit personal information, such as Social Security numbers.

“We are all living through difficult times, and unfortunately, there are people who will try to take advantage of others who may need help meeting essential needs. Be mindful, stay aware, and if you think something looks off, it probably is,” DHS Secretary Teresa Miller said.

DHS is investigating a report of individuals receiving calls with pre-recorded messages advising them to expedite their P-EBT benefits issuance by providing their Social Security number and case record number. In the message, the speaker claims to be from a County Assistance Office (CAO).

DHS and other government agencies do not ask for information about P-EBT, SNAP or any other public-assistance programs via unsolicited or random calls or texts, and Pennsylvanians should not reply to such a call or text or share any personal information if they are contacted in this way. If you or anyone you work with receive unsolicited or random calls or text messages telling you that you qualify for assistance and then asking for personal information, it is most likely a scam. Do not respond. Delete the message so you do not get caught in an identity theft scam.

Pennsylvanians who have questions about whether a call, text, letter, or other communication is legitimate should contact DHS’ Office of Income Maintenance. Clients in Philadelphia should call the Philadelphia Customer Service Center at 215-560-7226. Clients in all other counties can call the Statewide Customer Service Center at 1-877-395-8930.

The federal government authorized P-EBT in the spring to allow states to assist families with school-age children who qualified for free-and-reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program – and who lost their easy access to breakfast and lunch at school as a result of the school closures related to COVID-19 earlier this year.

DHS began distributing P-EBT benefits to Pennsylvania families in late May. To date, more than \$360 million has been distributed to about 680,000 households to help families feed nearly 1 million children. Families received about \$370 per child.

DHS administered this program in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and schools across the commonwealth. The program was recently reauthorized by the federal government for the 2020-2021 school year. Pennsylvania and other states are currently awaiting guidance from the United States Department of Agriculture to begin the program for the current school year.

Additional information about Pennsylvania's P-EBT can be found [here](#).

If Pennsylvanians need help purchasing or affording food for themselves and their families, help may also be available through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP helps nearly 1.9 million Pennsylvanians by providing assistance each month for groceries, helping households purchase enough food to avoid going hungry. SNAP is our country's most important and most impactful anti-hunger program. For every meal provided by a Feeding Pennsylvania food bank, SNAP provides nine. While SNAP is intended to be a supplemental program, during a pandemic and historic unemployment, resources are strained, particularly for our lowest income Pennsylvanians.

Applications for the SNAP and other public assistance programs can be submitted online at www.compass.state.pa.us. All Pennsylvanians experiencing financial hardships due to the pandemic, a lost job, or a change in income are strongly encouraged to apply and see if they qualify for assistance with food, health care, and other essential needs.

For more information about food assistance resources for people around Pennsylvania impacted by COVID-19 and the accompanying economic insecurity, visit the [Department of Agriculture's food security guide](#).