



**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
AMERICAN SAMOA GOVERNMENT**

PRESS RELEASE

**\$8.8 million for Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) Program for
American Samoa's School-Aged Children for School Year 2021-2022**

Governor's Office – March 22, 2022 —Governor Lemanu P.S. Mauga today announced that the Department of Human and Social Services (DHSS) has received approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), of American Samoa's State Plan to operate a Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) Program for families of school-aged children who lost access to free meals at school from the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) due to school closures or reduced attendance or hours due to concerns about COVID-19 during School Year 2021-2022.

In making the announcement, Governor Lemanu said, "I am very grateful to USDA's FNS Administrator, Cindy Long, and FNS Western Regional Administrator, Jesus Mendoza, for approving our second P-EBT State Plan to ensure that American Samoa families can continue to put food on their tables and have access to nutritious food for their children when schools are closed or reduced attendance and hours due to the coronavirus". He continued, "This second round of federal P-EBT assistance will also address food insecurity as we continue with our efforts in overcoming COVID-19".

In this second round of P-EBT benefits, DHSS has received approval to issue an estimated \$8.8 million to approximately 14,000 children for school closures and reductions in attendance and hours from February 22 to June 10, 2022, when the current school year ends. P-EBT benefits will be calculated at \$8.28 per day for the duration of the school closure that began February 22 and for any additional COVID-related absences if schools reopen before the end of the current school year. This rate is equal to the NSLP daily reimbursement for a free breakfast, lunch, and snack.

The American Samoa Nutrition Assistance Program (ASNAP) Division of DHSS will again operate the program and issue P-EBT benefits in the form of food stamp coupons to households of school-aged children with P-EBT qualified days.

Households are required to complete an application to provide basic information for their children for them to receive P-EBT benefits. Households who participated in the P-EBT Program for School Year 2020-2021 do not need to reapply. Applications will only be available online. As with the first round of the P-EBT, DHSS will use school data from the Department of Education (DOE) and all the private schools to confirm the children's eligibility. Only parents whose names appear on the official school records may apply for their children.

DHSS will announce in the coming days and weeks how families may apply for P-EBT benefits along with other pertinent information that includes the address to the P-EBT online portal for

applications; timeline for the issuance of benefits; retail stores to use their food coupons and expiration dates of P-EBT benefits. DHSS will also work closely with DOE and the private schools to ensure that they track COVID-related absences and virtual learning days for each enrolled student through their student information systems if schools reopen before the end of the current school year. This information, which must be submitted every month to the ASNAP Division, along with the duration of the school closure that began on February 22, will be used to calculate the total benefits for each student at the end of the school year. P-EBT benefits will be issued one-time-only by the ASNAP Division starting in July 2022.

In conclusion, Governor Lemanu said, “This program will provide a nutritional resource for families of children who lost access to free meals at school due to school closures and reduced school hours because of COVID-19. On behalf of the people of American Samoa, I extend my appreciation to the USDA FNS teams at the national and regional levels for their continued support of nutrition assistance programs for the residents of American Samoa”.