



# Texas Should Accept Federal Dollars to Feed Hungry Children This Summer\*

## Introduction

**The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched a new program this year to feed children during the summer, when school meals are not available.** The Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program for Children (Summer EBT) provides \$120 per child, loaded onto a debit card parents can use during the summer to buy groceries for children who were already enrolled and participating in school meal programs during the year. For families to benefit, their state leaders must opt into the program.

**Texas was 1 of just 13 states that rejected federal dollars to feed children in summer 2024.** If the state had participated in the program, the federal government would have provided **\$450 million** to help families buy food for their children. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) agreed on the importance of feeding children during the summer but could not implement the new program in 2024 for administrative reasons. According to state officials, starting the program in 2024 required state funds that the state legislature had not appropriated. Additionally, state officials had limited bandwidth, needing to redetermine eligibility for **6 million Texans** enrolled in Medicaid during the public health emergency. Further complicating matters, federal guidance was missing until days before the state had to decide whether to proceed for 2024.

**Texas has not yet decided whether to claim these federal dollars for 2025.** The state was unable to meet the August 15 due date for providing the federal government with an administrative plan for this summer (termed the “Interim Program of Operations for 2025,” or “Interim POMS”). However, Texas obtained a waiver giving it additional time to prepare and submit its interim POMS.

**A combination of federal funding and Texas’s projected budget surplus presents a unique opportunity to address child hunger in the state.** The federal government funds 100% of Summer EBT benefits and 50% of administrative costs. States can further reduce their administrative costs by seeking federal grants to help fund the modernization of computer systems for implementation.

Texas’s budget surplus suggests the state can afford the investment needed to draw down these federal dollars. For instance, in 2023, the state recorded a surplus of around \$32.7 billion. Texas also has a projected **\$18.6 billion** budget surplus for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. In addition, Texas can use any unspent amounts from the **\$87.7 million** in federal dollars Texas received under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to strengthen the administration of its nutrition programs.

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UnidosUS analyzed data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey (HPS) and found that by accepting federal assistance, Texas could provide a lifeline to more than a million children left hungry during the summer. Fielded roughly once a month, HPS asks parents whether their children had enough food to eat in the seven days prior to the survey. Based on data from summer 2023 and 2024, we estimated the average number of Texas children who do not have enough food to eat when school is out for summer.

## More than a million Texas children do not have enough food during the summer — and half of these hungry children are Latino<sup>†</sup>

**The choice to leave families without additional support throughout the summer will continue the cycle of childhood hunger in the state.** During the average summer month, 1.3 million Texas children do not have enough food to eat (Table 1).

**The state’s current summer feeding programs do not close this gap.** While current programs are assisting numerous families, 1.3 million Texas children still lack food during the summer. More help is needed.

**Food deficits harm children of all races and ethnicities, but Hispanic children are disproportionately harmed.** Among Texas’s children who do not have enough food over the summer, more than 650,000 are Latino, making up **52%** of the state’s hungry children. Non-Hispanic Black children make up 22% (274,000), while non-Hispanic white children account for 17% (213,000) (Table 1).

**Table 1. Distribution by race and ethnicity of Texas children without enough food to eat (Summer 2023-2024)**

Race/ethnicity	Number of children who did not have enough food to eat	Share of children who did not have enough to eat
Latino	651,000	52%
Non-Hispanic Black	274,000	22%
Non-Hispanic White	213,000	17%
Other	85,000	7%
Unspecified	38,000	3%
<b>All children</b>	<b>1,262,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: UnidosUS analysis of Household Pulse Survey (HPS) data from cycles 6-8 for 2024 and cycles 58-61 for 2023 .

Note: Sums may not total because of rounding. Latinos are Hispanics of all races. All other racial and ethnic groups are limited to non-Hispanics.

<sup>†</sup> The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

## Turning away federal food dollars hurts children's health and weakens the state's economy

**Hunger and food insecurity can harm children's health.** Holding all other factors constant, researchers [report](#) that household food insecurity increases children's asthma rates by 19%, emergency department visits by 26% and depression by 28%.

**Children are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity during the summer, when school meals are typically unavailable.** School meals can be one of the healthiest sources of food for children and, for some children, the only meals they eat all day.

**Rejecting federal food money weakens economic growth in Texas.** Without those resources, families buy less food, which reduces sales for grocers and other retailers. The damage extends to other economic sectors, as retailers with reduced revenue buy fewer goods and services from other Texas businesses. Because of this “multiplier effect,” the non-partisan [Food and Research Action Center](#) found that Texas's rejection of federal food money for summer EBT cut economic activity between \$675 million and \$810 million, reducing state and local revenue and eliminating jobs.

**Rejecting federal food assistance denies Texas families the help they need paying high food costs.** Texas grocery prices are among the [top ten](#) of any state in the country. According to a [poll](#) conducted by No Kid Hungry Texas:

- 77% of Texans are struggling to afford groceries, with more than 80% of people reporting that food prices are rising faster than their incomes.
- More than 50% of Texans are often forced to choose between food and other essentials like rent, utilities and medicine — a figure that increases to 60% for families with children and 66% for Texans in rural areas.
- Higher food prices have forced many Texans, particularly families with children, to buy cheaper, less nutritious food than in the past. Almost 50% of Texans report buying no protein or less protein than in previous years. More than 40% buy less fresh produce than in the past.

It comes as no surprise that with so many Texans struggling with grocery costs, **Latino voters want elected officials to lower families' food costs.** According to polling by the UnidosUS Latino Vote Initiative:

- [Latino voters in Texas](#) believe that cost of living and inflation are the most important issues for elected officials to address.
- Among Latino voters [nationally](#), those who prioritize the cost of living are concerned about the cost of “food and basic living expenses,” more than about any other expense, including housing costs and gas prices.



## Texas's leaders should take specific steps to help children and businesses by claiming federal food dollars

Several steps are essential for policymakers to take in the near term. For example:

- HHSC should complete the planning work needed to implement Summer EBT in 2025, filing an interim POMS as soon as possible, and then completing the remaining steps needed to qualify for federal dollars. States now face a February 15 due date for final planning materials for 2025 Summer EBT. If Texas can't meet that due date, HHSC should again ask federal officials for extensions, as they have granted for other states.
- HHSC should explore strategies to reduce state administrative costs by pursuing [federal grants](#) to cover some of the program's technology costs and by seeking philanthropic support to draw down matching federal administrative dollars.
- The Legislature should use a tiny fraction of the state's budget surplus to cover remaining state administrative costs needed to claim federal dollars to feed Texas children and sustain Texas businesses. The Legislature should also explore whether any unspent ARPA dollars could contribute to technology updates needed to improve Summer EBT implementation and streamline the administration of nutrition security programs more broadly.

Many circumstances that contributed to Texas's refusal of 2024 Summer EBT money are long gone. State officials have completed Medicaid redeterminations for people covered during the public health emergency. And the necessary federal guidance has been in hand for more than a year. It's time for Texas's elected leaders to accept federal funds to help the state's families feed their children this summer.

## Conclusion

Last summer, 37 states, led by Republicans and Democrats alike, did the work needed to claim hundreds of millions of federal dollars to feed hungry children during summer and to stimulate economic activity supporting employers.

Texas's children and families need help coping with the high price of food, just as much as children and families in these other states. Texas officials are no less competent and dedicated than officials in other states.

With the benefit of both time and a healthy budget, state leaders are in a position to claim these benefits in 2025, if they so choose to do so.

### About UnidosUS

UnidosUS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves as the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Since 1968, we have challenged the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos through our unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an [Affiliate Network](#) of more than 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. We believe in an America where economic, political, and social progress is a reality for all Latinos, and we collaborate across communities to achieve it.

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