

May 14, 2021

Executive Commissioner Cecile Young  
Texas Health and Human Services Commission  
4900 N. Lamar Boulevard  
Austin, TX 78751  
P.O. Box 13247

**Re: Immediate Actions to Address Child Food Insecurity in Texas**

Dear Executive Commissioner Young:

On behalf of UnidosUS (formerly the National Council of La Raza), I thank you for submitting Texas's Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) plan for the 2020-21 school year. UnidosUS is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization and has built a stronger country by creating opportunities for Hispanics for more than 50 years. The UnidosUS Texas-based Affiliates, led by Mexican American Unity Council, Inc. and Project Bravo, Inc., include 28 community-based organizations that invest more than \$775 million, and employ more than 6,200 staff to provide direct services to approximately 240,000 Texans and challenge the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Hispanics in Texas. While Texas has taken some important steps to respond to COVID-19, more work is needed to increase food access for Hispanic children and families who continue to experience high rates of food insecurity magnified by COVID-19 and, most recently, Winter Storm Uri. Months into the pandemic, [more than 20%](#) of Texas Hispanic households with children reported not having enough food to eat. In February 2021, [Winter Storm Uri](#) left millions of Texans without power, water, and food. These crises have reinforced the need for increased, consistent access to affordable, nutritious food. For these reasons, we ask that you use your authority to act on the following:

**Remove barriers to remote application assistance.** In order to provide telephonic application assistance, Texas Community Partners Program site navigators must obtain consent from SNAP applicants with a Texas 2-1-1 Program representative on the line. Unfortunately, [wait times](#) to access 2-1-1 representatives over the phone remain high. The other option available for site navigators is to utilize an online platform where SNAP applicants provide their consent via electronic signature to receive remote application assistance. This option, however, prevents eligible Texans who have limited access to smartphones, internet, or a computer from receiving direct enrollment assistance. Texas HHS should allow site navigators to obtain verbal consent directly from applicants without 2-1-1 program representatives to ensure that all eligible families are able to apply for and receive food assistance.

**Implement a culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate public awareness campaign on P-EBT.** P-EBT is critical to ensure that more than 3.6 million Texas children who lost access to free or reduced-price meals due to school and child care closures can eat. As you work to implement P-EBT for the 2020-21 school year, we urge you to work with the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Department of Agriculture to develop and execute a robust P-EBT public information campaign that reaches all eligible households, including those with Spanish-speaking and mixed-immigration-status family members. We also ask that you collaborate with community-based partners, local Texas HHS offices, and school districts to make information about P-EBT eligibility and enrollment clear and accessible to reach every eligible family.

**Remove P-EBT application prompt for Social Security Numbers.** While SSNs are not required for eligible families to apply for P-EBT benefits, Texas's P-EBT application for the 2019-2020 school year prompted applicants to provide their child's SSN, [raising concerns](#) among eligible families. While the vast majority of Hispanic children in Texas are citizens (95%), nearly half (49%) live in mixed-status households. As Texas works to develop its P-EBT application for the 2020-21 school year, we ask that you remove the SSN field and clearly indicate in the application that P-EBT will not factor into a public charge determination, and that all families are eligible to apply regardless of immigration status. These changes will help reduce confusion around eligibility for P-EBT and ensure Texas families are able to put food on the table during the pandemic.

Longstanding disparities in food access evident in Texas will only get worse unless state leaders remove barriers to food assistance programs for all eligible children and families. For this reason, the undersigned urge you to immediately take action to increase access to food assistance programs, such as SNAP and P-EBT, to ensure that all children and families have access to healthy food. Please contact Manuel Grajeda, UnidosUS Texas Strategist, at [mgrajeda@unidosus.org](mailto:mgrajeda@unidosus.org) for any questions or additional information.

Sincerely,



Eric Rodriguez  
Senior Vice President  
UnidosUS

Fernando Godinez  
President and CEO  
Mexican American Unity Council, Inc.

Laura Ponce  
Executive Director  
El Paso Community Action Program, Project BRAVO, Inc.

CC:

Commissioner Sid Miller  
Texas Department of Agriculture

Commissioner of Education Mike Morath  
Texas Education Agency

Governor Greg Abbott  
Office of the Texas Governor

Lt. Governor Dan Patrick  
Office of the Lieutenant Governor