



CARTER • GREENE • HANCOCK • HAWKINS
JOHNSON • SULLIVAN • WASHINGTON • UNICOI

1020 Jericho Drive
Kingsport, Tennessee 37663
Ph: 423-279-0430
www.netfoodbank.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
12/20/2024

Contact: Karen Todd
Community Relations Coordinator
Phone: (423)279-0430 ext. 237
Email: ktodd@netfoodbank.org

Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee Advocates for Governor Lee to Continue Summer EBT Feeding Program for Tennessee's Children

[Kingsport, TN] – [December, 20, 2024] – Today's students are tomorrow's leaders. When school closes for the summer, millions of U.S. children lose access to their only reliable source of nutritious meals. Last summer, the USDA's Summer EBT program ensured that more than 20 million children across the country continued to have access to adequate nutrition, enabling them to return to school in the fall of 2024 well-nourished and ready to learn.

By providing grocery benefits, the Summer EBT program allows families to select the healthy food that best meets the needs and tastes of their individual family while maintaining a sense of dignity by being able to shop alongside other members of their community at their community grocery store. This program could not have been created at a more critical time—Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap shows that about 20% of the children and their families living in Northeast Tennessee may be food insecure without reliable access to food. A bipartisan coalition in Congress was responsible for creating this vital nutrition assistance program, and the USDA and State agencies successfully implemented the program last year, after providing a similar service during the pandemic, to ensure children in the U.S. are nourished and healthy year-round.

Last year Governor Lee and Commissioner Clarence Carter made sure that Tennessee led in launching this critical federal initiative. In 2024, nearly 700,000 children across the state received Summer EBT benefits, providing a lifeline when school lunch programs were unavailable. This year, Governor Lee indicates that he does not plan to opt in for Tennesseans to participate in this vital program. The impact of Summer EBT goes far beyond individual families. When inflation continues to drive up food prices, these benefits have helped ease financial strain for many households. For this school year, the federal government has a January 1 deadline for states to commit to distribute Summer EBT benefits in 2025. "Tennessee must reaffirm its leadership by ensuring this program will continue for Summer 2025," says Rhonda Chafin, Executive Director of Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee. The cost to our state's budget is minimal. The State paid a little over \$5.7million in administrative costs for a program that provided more than \$78million in Federal Summer EBT funds to struggling Tennessee families. We trust that our Governor will show compassionate leadership and re-approve Tennessee's participation in this critical program for Tennessee's children.

Rhonda Chafin, Executive Director of Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee, was recently featured in a national news story by NBC concerning Tennessee's Summer EBT

program and the likelihood that Governor Lee will not renew. Ms. Chafin has also written an Op-Ed that should appear in *The Tennessean*, the Nashville newspaper.

####

Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee's (SHFBNT) mission is to feed the hungry in Northeast Tennessee by securing donations of food from national and local manufacturers, grocers, and individuals and redistribute them to partner food pantries. Additionally, SHFBNT programs provide hunger relief services for an average of 43,000 food-insecure individuals per month in Carter, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Washington, and Unicoi Counties. SHFBNT is a 501©3 organization located in Kingsport, Tennessee and is a member of Feeding America, the Nation's largest Food Bank network. Website: www.netfoodbank.org.