



Maryland

Department of
Human Services

Report on Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) Program Grant Application, Implementation, and Participation

*Completed pursuant to the 2024 Joint Chairmen's Report, page 152 and
Chapters 635 and 636 of the Acts of 2019*

December 4, 2024

REPORT REQUIREMENT

This report is hereby submitted in response to the following reporting requirements:

Report on Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children Grant Applications

That, on or before October 1 of each year, the Department of Human Services shall report, in accordance with § 2-1246 [now § 2-1257] of the State Government Article, to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and the House Appropriations Committee on the status of the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children grant application and, if a grant has been awarded, the progress toward implementing a demonstration project.

Source: Chapters 635 and 636 of the Acts of 2019

Summer EBT Program Implementation and Participation

The committees request that DHS submit a report that:

- *discusses actions taken by DHS to implement the new Summer EBT program;*
- *provides detail on administrative costs of the program;*
- *discusses efforts to work with local education agencies to implement the program;*
- *describes barriers or challenges faced in the implementation of the Summer EBT program;*
- *describes the timing for benefits to be distributed to families, including information regarding whether it will be distributed monthly, more than once per month, or in one lump sum, and;*
- *provides information on the number of children receiving benefits by jurisdiction and month in the Summer EBT program as well as the dollar amount of benefits provided by jurisdiction and month.*

The report should also detail information regarding federal requirements for benefit distribution timelines including frequency and required dates of distributions, any flexibilities that the State has in determining the dates and frequency of distribution, and any other information related to the department's final determination of the dates and frequency of benefit distribution.

Source: 2024 Joint Chairmen's Report, page 152

Summary

"No child should ever go hungry – and yet, we know that putting food on the table is a challenge for many Maryland families," **said Gov. Wes Moore**. "That's why our administration launched a frontal assault on child poverty by bringing those closest to the challenges to the table to help us find solutions. Maryland SUN Bucks marks our latest action to ensure that our children can stay healthy as they learn and grow – and it won't be the last." [Governor's Press Release, October 3, 2024](#).

We are pleased to announce that the expanded Maryland SUN Bucks program has helped feed more than 594,000 students this past summer.

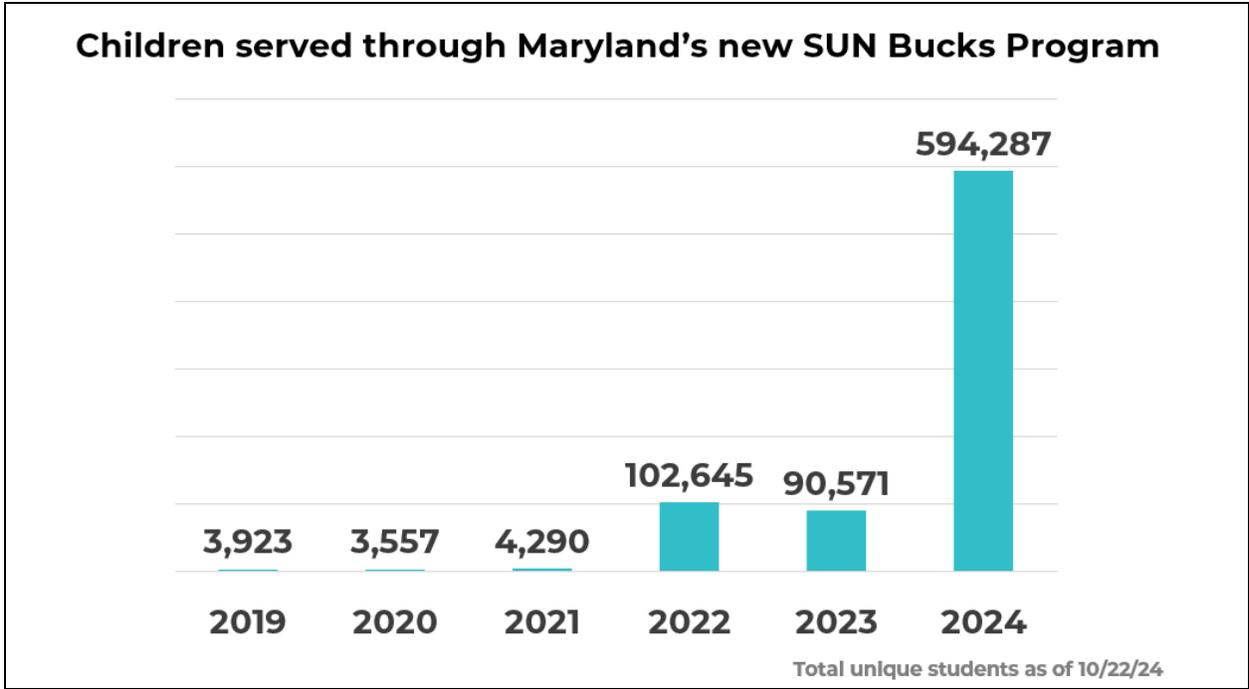
In summer 2024, Maryland worked with federal and state government partners to launch the Maryland SUN Bucks program, which provided \$40 per month for June, July and August (\$120 total) for each eligible child. The Maryland SUN Bucks program used a more efficient enrollment approach that reduced the administrative burden on families. Instead of needing to apply, the vast majority of families—99% of students who received Maryland SUN Bucks—were automatically enrolled.

THE HISTORY OF MARYLAND SUN BUCKS AND STATUS OF DEMONSTRATION GRANT APPLICATION AND AWARD

In 2019, the Maryland General Assembly [authorized](#) the Summer SNAP for Children program to help Maryland families with money for food during the summer months when school meals were not available. From 2019-2023, the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) sought a federal demonstration grant for Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) for Children to support the new state law. However, the United States Congress replaced the earlier demonstration grant when it authorized and funded a permanent Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) program under the Consolidated Appropriation Act of 2023.

States and Independent Tribal Organizations (ITOs) were given the option to implement this program in summer 2024 or defer implementation until summer 2025. Because of Maryland's existing state Summer SNAP for Children program, the State was in a good position to leverage lessons learned and move forward urgently with the implementation of SUN Bucks in summer 2024.

For comparison purposes, in 2019, we served 3,923 students statewide. In 2023, we served 90,571 students statewide. The state and local funded Summer SNAP program had challenges with limited funding and administrative bottlenecks. Please see below.



ACTIONS TAKEN BY DHS TO IMPLEMENT THE NEW SUMMER EBT PROGRAM (SUN BUCKS)

With guidance and oversight from USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), Maryland DHS collaborated with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), and the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE) to implement SUN Bucks. FNS considers the new permanent program as one part of their Summer Nutrition (SUN) Programs for Kids and as such, refers to Summer EBT as “SUN Bucks.” Maryland’s Summer EBT program name is “Maryland SUN Bucks.”

SUN Bucks features a simple application process with automatic enrollment for families who already receive SNAP, Temporary Cash Assistance, or Medicaid. Eligible families received \$40 per month for June, July, and August for a combined \$120 total for each eligible child.

More than 99% of students who received Maryland SUN Bucks were automatically enrolled, including school-aged children and teens who receive free and reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP); who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), or Medical Assistance (MA); who live in out-of-home care, or who are unhoused or homeless. Automatic enrollment through direct certification saved hundreds of thousands of families time and energy and provided them with the resources they needed. Families received benefits directly on their Electronic Benefits Transfer cards or via Maryland SUN Bucks card. DHS entered into a data-sharing agreement with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE). This agreement enabled

Maryland to directly certify children participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and Foster Care.

While all Maryland public schools participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), some of those schools are Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) where all students receive free school meals regardless of their individual household financial situation. Because these students were not determined eligible based on their household income, they were not eligible for direct certification for NSLP participation. Students in CEP schools thus needed to apply for Maryland SUN Bucks if they were not otherwise directly certified as SNAP, TCA, or MA participants. DHS created an [online application](#) for Maryland SUN Bucks and a system for determining eligibility. Eligibility is primarily based on household income and enrollment status in a Maryland school.

Information about the program is available on the website: [Maryland SUN Bucks page](#). This page was designed with anticipated Frequently Asked Questions surrounding eligibility, application process, and access to the benefit in mind.

Maryland SUN Bucks funds were issued using Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. Thirty-five percent (35%) of eligible students received benefits on an existing EBT card; 65% of students reside in households that did not have an existing EBT card and were each issued a newly designed, Maryland SUN Bucks card.

THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN RECEIVING BENEFITS BY JURISDICTION AND MONTH

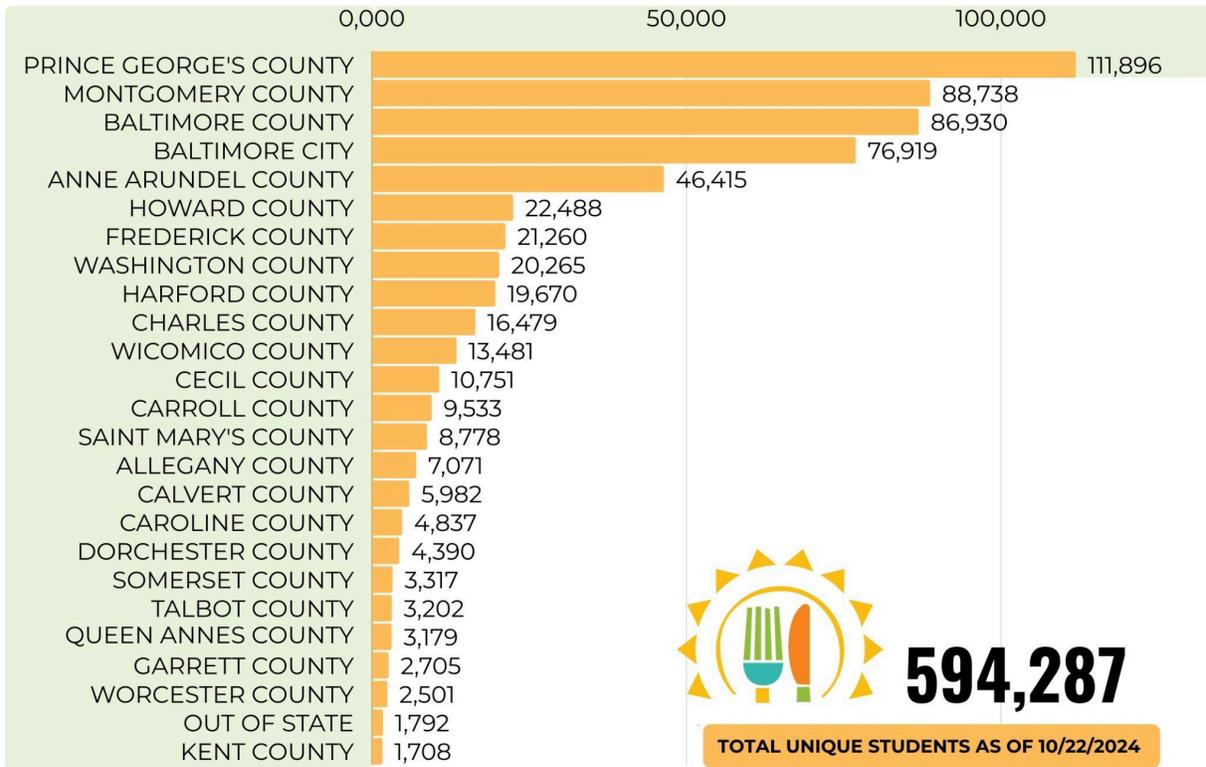
The Maryland SUN Bucks program served 594,287 students in the summer of 2024 (June - September 2024), as of October 22, 2024¹. Maryland issued \$71.54 million in federally-funded grocery buying benefits, making SUN Bucks the largest investment to combat childhood hunger during the summer months in Maryland's history.

Families in all of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions received benefits and local government matching funds were not required. The Eastern Shore witnessed a 10-fold increase in participation, while Western Maryland experienced a remarkable 71-fold rise, compared to the earlier iteration of the program.

Both tables below represent issuances as of October 22, 2024.

¹ Note: the numbers reported here differ from the [press release, issued on October 3, 2024](#), because of issuances in the months following the summer that occurred after the publication of the press release. DHS was able to certify additional eligible students based on a final enrollment list from MSDE and analysis of DHS program data, including those who may have become eligible for direct certification during the summer operational period, after the initial direct certification list was established. We anticipate this number to increase slightly through December 2024 as DHS is notified about students who are eligible for SUN Bucks but were identified later in the process.

SUN BUCKS ISSUANCE BY JURISDICTION SUMMER 2024



594,287 total includes 1,792 Maryland students with out of state addresses

Updated 10/22/2024	Issuance Month								Total Summer 2024	
	Jun 2024		Jul 2024		Aug 2024		Sep 2024		Total Unique Students Jun-Sept 2024	SUN Bucks Total Issuance Amounts Jun-Sept 2024
Residential Jurisdiction	Total Unique Students	Total Issuance Amount	Total Unique Students	Total Issuance Amount	Total Unique Students	Total Issuance Amount	Total Unique Students	Total Issuance Amount		
ALLEGANY COUNTY	6,714	\$268,560.00	6,601	\$264,760.00	7,000	\$312,000.00	71	\$8,520.00	7,071	\$853,840.00
ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY	42,657	\$1,706,280.00	42,394	\$1,699,000.00	45,962	\$2,125,000.00	453	\$54,240.00	46,415	\$5,584,520.00
BALTIMORE CITY	72,350	\$2,894,000.00	71,451	\$2,871,920.00	76,177	\$3,426,680.00	742	\$87,840.00	76,919	\$9,280,440.00
BALTIMORE COUNTY	78,343	\$3,133,720.00	77,913	\$3,134,200.00	85,703	\$4,052,080.00	1,227	\$146,160.00	86,930	\$10,466,160.00
CALVERT COUNTY	5,554	\$222,160.00	5,513	\$220,560.00	5,923	\$269,720.00	59	\$7,080.00	5,982	\$719,520.00
CAROLINE COUNTY	4,401	\$176,040.00	4,385	\$176,640.00	4,789	\$223,880.00	48	\$5,760.00	4,837	\$582,320.00
CARROLL COUNTY	8,615	\$344,600.00	8,534	\$342,040.00	9,383	\$443,440.00	150	\$17,960.00	9,533	\$1,148,040.00
CECIL COUNTY	9,889	\$395,560.00	9,794	\$392,440.00	10,603	\$488,920.00	148	\$17,760.00	10,751	\$1,294,680.00
CHARLES COUNTY	15,172	\$606,880.00	15,088	\$605,600.00	16,271	\$745,640.00	208	\$24,840.00	16,479	\$1,982,960.00
DORCHESTER COUNTY	4,071	\$162,840.00	4,016	\$161,440.00	4,341	\$199,720.00	49	\$5,800.00	4,390	\$529,800.00
FREDERICK COUNTY	19,324	\$772,960.00	19,181	\$768,000.00	20,973	\$982,520.00	287	\$33,960.00	21,260	\$2,557,440.00
GARRETT COUNTY	2,400	\$96,000.00	2,374	\$94,960.00	2,680	\$131,520.00	25	\$3,000.00	2,705	\$325,480.00
HARFORD COUNTY	18,120	\$724,800.00	17,955	\$720,280.00	19,449	\$899,000.00	221	\$26,280.00	19,670	\$2,370,360.00
HOWARD COUNTY	20,689	\$827,560.00	20,484	\$819,960.00	22,174	\$1,022,680.00	314	\$37,160.00	22,488	\$2,707,360.00
KENT COUNTY	1,557	\$62,280.00	1,557	\$62,720.00	1,697	\$79,080.00	11	\$1,320.00	1,708	\$205,400.00
MONTGOMERY COUNTY	79,261	\$3,170,440.00	78,901	\$3,164,080.00	87,396	\$4,176,600.00	1,342	\$159,840.00	88,738	\$10,670,960.00
OUT OF STATE	1,585	\$63,400.00	1,542	\$61,760.00	1,626	\$72,200.00	166	\$19,920.00	1,792	\$217,280.00
PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY	99,639	\$3,985,560.00	99,244	\$3,984,240.00	110,130	\$5,277,120.00	1,766	\$211,240.00	111,896	\$13,458,160.00
QUEEN ANNES COUNTY	2,914	\$116,560.00	2,892	\$115,840.00	3,144	\$145,920.00	35	\$4,200.00	3,179	\$382,520.00
SAINT MARY'S COUNTY	8,079	\$323,160.00	8,063	\$325,080.00	8,692	\$398,520.00	86	\$10,160.00	8,778	\$1,056,920.00
SOMERSET COUNTY	3,058	\$122,320.00	3,002	\$120,360.00	3,271	\$152,320.00	46	\$5,520.00	3,317	\$400,520.00
TALBOT COUNTY	2,962	\$118,480.00	2,929	\$117,200.00	3,171	\$146,240.00	31	\$3,720.00	3,202	\$385,640.00
WASHINGTON COUNTY	18,151	\$726,040.00	17,974	\$719,920.00	19,990	\$960,800.00	275	\$32,880.00	20,265	\$2,439,640.00
WICOMICO COUNTY	11,977	\$479,080.00	11,852	\$475,480.00	13,221	\$638,440.00	260	\$31,120.00	13,481	\$1,624,120.00
WORCESTER COUNTY	2,522	\$100,880.00	2,488	\$100,080.00	2,500	\$101,120.00	1	\$120.00	2,501	\$302,200.00
Statewide Total	540,004	\$21,600,160.00	536,127	\$21,518,560.00	586,266	\$27,471,160.00	8,021	\$956,400.00	594,287	\$71,546,280.00

Notes

Data source: Qlik *Eligibility & Enrollment System SUN Bucks (Summer EBT) Report*, data pulled 10/22/2024.

Issuance Month: The month in which the benefit was disbursed from the system. This differs from the benefit month, which represents the eligibility period for which the benefit was granted (Ex: Students who were approved for SUN Bucks in July received benefits for both June and July with a July Issuance Month).

Issuance Amount: The monetary benefit amount that was dispersed during the issuance month.

Unique Students: An unduplicated count of students. If a student is issued benefits for multiple benefit months in that month or that time period, the student is counted only once.

Out of State: Students enrolled and participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in a Maryland school whose residential addresses are out of state (usually bordering jurisdictions).

DETAILS ON ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS OF THE PROGRAM

To implement SUN Bucks, DHS budgeted \$11.6 million for administrative expenses. Maryland invested \$5.8 million in the state fiscal year (FY) 2025, and the other half is matched by the federal government. The administrative costs include:

- salaries, benefits, and associated costs for 100 staff dedicated to the administration of SUN Bucks statewide;
- issuing and managing EBT cards for customers;
- Online application development and other system changes; and
- Mailing costs.

To date, DHS has filled 79 of the 100 budgeted SUN Bucks positions. This year one report captures SUN Bucks activities for four months - for the months of June through September 2024. The department plans to provide the detailed administrative costs report in 2025 after a full year of operation.

EFFORTS TO WORK WITH LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM

DHS worked with MSDE's Office of School and Community Nutrition Program and the Office of Performance Reporting and Accountability to plan correspondence and outreach to schools and families, increasing awareness about SUN Bucks. Early on DHS and MSDE identified the need to emphasize the importance of applying for SUN Bucks for those families with students enrolled in Community Eligibility Provision schools because of the direct certification gap for those students. Close coordination between DHS and MSDE allowed DHS to ensure that all eligible students and their families learned about SUN Bucks and how to apply, if direct certification wasn't possible.

MSDE effectively utilized established partnerships with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to collect student data necessary for performing direct certification for students enrolled in qualifying programs at regular intervals. This collaboration

ensured accurate data management regarding student enrollment, including the tracking of those who may enter or exit the school system and any other changes in enrollment status.

At every stage of the information exchange, stringent confidentiality measures were implemented. All entities involved in the eligibility process employed secure electronic file transfers to share data, ensuring the protection of sensitive information. This process also included an attestation statement informing parents and guardians that a child may not receive SUN Bucks benefits from more than one state.

DESCRIBE THE TIMING FOR BENEFITS TO BE DISTRIBUTED TO FAMILIES, INCLUDING INFORMATION REGARDING WHETHER IT WILL BE DISTRIBUTED MONTHLY, MORE THAN ONCE PER MONTH, OR IN ONE LUMP SUM

FNS regulations gave states the option to issue benefits in a lump sum or in monthly installments. Since the program's intent is to help families throughout the summer, DHS and MSDE determined together that monthly installments would accomplish that best. Thus, Maryland SUN Bucks provided monthly payments of \$40 each for June, July, and August for a total of \$120 per eligible child. These payments were issued during the last week of each month to distinguish them from issuances of any other DHS benefits that a household may have also received. Payments of other benefits occur earlier in each month, so the goal of issuing SUN Bucks during the last week was to assist households during a time when any other assistance may have already been exhausted for the month. Students that were determined eligible for SUN Bucks after the month of June received a lump sum for the prior month(s) and current month of eligibility.

DESCRIBE BARRIERS OR CHALLENGES FACED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUMMER EBT PROGRAM

The implementation of SUN Bucks was successful. We administered benefits 52 days after federal and state approval.

We developed an online SUN Bucks application and eligibility determination process prior to the start of the summer of 2024. We have identified system enhancements that will improve the customer experience and will target their completion for summer 2025.

In addition, we are working with MSDE to streamline our data collection and matching process so that we (1) identify students eligible for direct certification as early as possible, and (2) ensure that students' addresses on file are not outdated by the time their eligibility is determined.