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Outreach Campaign Launched to Increase Awareness of Extra Food Benefits for Some Massachusetts Families During COVID-19 Pandemic

PSAs Featuring First Lady Lauren Baker & Wally the Green Monster, New Website Bring Awareness to New Program

BOSTON – The Shah Family Foundation and Project Bread in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) today launched an outreach campaign to ensure families know about extra food benefits available to them through Pandemic EBT, or P-EBT. The campaign includes a comprehensive website, www.MAP-EBT.org, and PSAs featuring First Lady Lauren Baker and Wally the Green Monster that showcase how the funds can be used.

“I’m glad to support this awareness campaign to help make sure that vulnerable children across the Commonwealth have access to healthy food,” said First Lady Lauren Baker. “The campaign’s goal is to make sure that people know these benefits are coming and how to use them. We’re proud to have such engaged partners in this important work.”

The Baker-Polito administration announced recently that it had received federal approval to promote increased food security for families who participate in the USDA’s National School Lunch Program (NSLP) through P-EBT. Families receiving P-EBT will get a payment of nearly $30 per week for each of their students, a benefit that will bring more than $200 million in federal dollars to the Commonwealth’s economy.

“All kids in Massachusetts, regardless of their family socio-economic background, deserve access to delicious, healthy foods,” said Jill Shah, President of the Shah Family Foundation. “We are honored to join with these partners to help spread the word about these funds and to help families understand that using these funds will help feed their family and help get the economy moving in their own communities.”

The campaign includes outreach to local municipal leaders, elected officials, community-based partners and organizations, school leaders, retailers and other stakeholders who can provide the necessary information to families seeking resources for food security.

Families already receiving DTA benefits (SNAP, TAFDC) will see the funds automatically loaded onto their EBT cards. Families who don’t currently receive DTA benefits, but whose children qualify for free or reduced price school meals, will receive a special P-EBT card in the mail.

“We’re pleased to work alongside such committed partners to make sure people know about this incredibly effective resource,” said Erin McAleer, President of Project Bread. “Families
can use P-EBT funds to shop for food that meets the unique needs of their household. That can mean shopping to accommodate dietary restrictions, choosing culturally relevant food, or grocery shopping when it is most convenient to the household schedule or availability of childcare. We want everyone to have the flexibility P-EBT provides and it begins with knowing about it.”

The new www.map-ebt.org website includes resources and a toolkit for others to help support participation in Massachusetts’ P-EBT program. The one-stop site provides families with information on how to access benefits, and local stakeholders with information to share with the families they serve. The online resources include instructions for families to activate their benefits, and a toolkit for retailers to use to help communicate the program. The outreach materials can be customized for each partner to use with their own communities and networks.

Since the beginning of this public health crisis, the weekly average number of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications received has increased by nearly 400%. DTA and DESE, along with Project Bread and the Shah Family Foundation, continue to work collaboratively to ensure all efforts to promote food security for families and children are made available to every community across the Commonwealth.

About the Shah Family Foundation:
The Shah Family Foundation supports innovative and transformative work in education, healthcare and the community. We believe that interesting and lasting solutions sit where these intersect. Our primary work and support is centered in Boston, with the goal of sharing broadly the programs and innovations that prove successful in our home town. Learn more at: http://www.shahfoundation.org.

About the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)
DTA assists and empowers low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long term economic self-sufficiency. DTA serves one in nine residents of the Commonwealth with direct economic assistance and food assistance, as well as workforce training opportunities. Learn more: https://www.mass.gov/DTA/COVID-19.

About MA DEPT of Elementary and Secondary Education: (DESE)
The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is committed to preparing all students for success after high school. The Department's work includes licensing educators, distributing state and federal education money, helping districts implement learning standards, overseeing statewide standardized tests, monitoring schools and districts, and convening districts and individuals to share best practices. In addition, we collect data to inform state and local decisions. Learn more: http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19.

About Project Bread:
Project Bread is committed to preventing and ending hunger in Massachusetts. We provide access to food for people who are hungry today while working to break the cycle of hunger through advocacy, education, and community action. Learn more at: www.projectbread.org.