

Mitigating Electronic Access Losses for Students (MEALS) Act

The Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) Program offers the opportunity to reduce childhood hunger in the summer by providing families whose children are eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals during the school year with additional resources to purchase food during the summer months.

S-EBT provides \$40 per child, per month grocery benefit to help with food costs during the summer months. S-EBT benefits can be redeemed at authorized retailers in participating states, Tribes, and territories. 38 states, the District of Columbia, five territories, and five Indian tribal organizations are participating or plan to participate in 2025.

S-EBT was permanently authorized by P.L. 117-328 and is a proven method to reduce household food insecurity and improve nutrition during the summer months once students are home for the summer.

Problem:

EBT skimming occurs when devices illegally installed on point-of-sale terminals capture card data and record cardholders' PIN entries. This data can be used to create fake payment cards and make unauthorized purchases or steal from the accounts. EBT card data has become a key target for many skimming groups since 2021 through card skimming. Criminals often cash out EBT benefits after these accounts receive monthly/bimonthly funding. EBT cardholders generally have limited protection, and as a result, they may not be reimbursed fully or at all for benefits lost.

Solution:

The Mitigating Electronic Access Losses for Students (MEALS) Act will help keep students fed during the summer months by allowing for the replacement of skimmed S-EBT benefits. Specifically, this legislation will:

The MEALS Act will:

- Require the Secretary of Agriculture to:
 - Issue guidance to State agencies and covered Indian Tribal organizations (ITOs) in detecting and preventing theft of summer EBT benefits, and issue a rule for participating State agencies and ITOs to take appropriate security measures and implement procedures for the replacement of summer EBT benefits;
 - Coordinate with the Office of Family Assistance at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Attorney General to determine how

summer EBT benefits are being stolen and establish measures to prevent summer EBT benefits from being stolen and establish standard reporting methods;

- Submit a report to Congress that includes the prevalence of summer EBT theft and measures established by the Secretary and AG;
- Require the Secretary to replace stolen summer EBT benefits, and State agencies and covered ITOs to submit claims for replacement benefits that include a signed statement by the affected household, data reports on benefit theft, and planned use of benefit theft prevention measures;
- Require GAO to submit a report to Congress that examines the risks related to summer EBT benefit payment system security and policy recommendations to improving the summer EBT payment system.