

## Opinion from the Post and Courier

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### Commentary: 1 in 6 SC kids at risk of going hungry. A small investment can change that.

By Darrell Jackson and Katrina Shealy

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SC Sens Darrell Jackson and Katrina Shealy

Ending childhood hunger must become a priority of our governor and the General Assembly. One in six children in South Carolina are at risk of going hungry every day, a statistic that we have the ability to change. We are working in the General Assembly to ensure that all children have access to a healthy breakfast and lunch while they are in school.

All states have the opportunity to ensure that children have access to healthy meals during the summer months through a program that expanded from a demonstration project in a handful of states to all states, Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer. Summer EBT benefits come in the form of pre-loaded cards that families can use to purchase groceries. Beginning this summer, families could receive \$40 per eligible child per month for a total of \$120 to use for nutritious food.

These benefits work together with other available federal nutrition assistance programs, such as summer feeding sites, SNAP, and WIC, to help ensure that children still have access to food when school is out. Unfortunately, South Carolina has failed to submit a letter to safeguard our ability to participate, thus cutting off a cost-effective program to provide nutritious food to those in need.

South Carolina, along with Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Idaho, Iowa, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Texas, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming, have refused even to put in a letter saying the state is willing to consider this program. Nebraska was on this list until Gov. Jim Pillen announced on Feb. 12 that the state had changed its position and put children first by submitting its decision to run a Summer EBT Program. Our state can and should do the same.

Under Summer EBT, families will have additional resources to purchase food at their local grocer or farmers' market. While there is a \$3 million administrative cost to the state, we will draw down more than \$65 million that will go into the local economy. SNAP benefits have a multiplier of 1.7, which means every dollar spent generates about \$1.70 into our state economy, ensuring we not only are taking care of our most valuable resource, our children, but also are helping to bolster our poorest communities.

This is not a partisan issue; members of the General Assembly on both sides of the aisle understand that hungry children cannot learn, and hunger does not stop during summer break. Our hardworking families must know that we will help them at every turn, including ensuring they have enough nutritious food on the table, as our lower-income constituents struggle to keep a roof over their heads and the lights on.

We are confident that Gov. Henry McMaster agrees with us that our most precious citizens must never go to bed hungry, and that is why we are going to ask to meet with him and ask for his leadership to do all he can to help the children of our state. Through the cooperation of the S.C. Department of Education with the S.C. Department of Social Services, we can change the narrative of so many children's lives by ensuring they don't have to face another day without enough healthy, nutritious food on their table.

Sen. **Darrell Jackson** is a Columbia Democrat, and Sen. **Katrina Shealy** is a Lexington Republican.