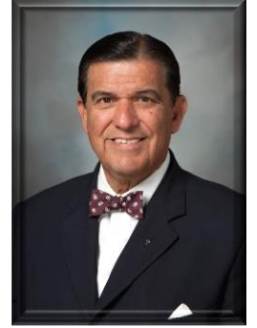




**STATE SENATOR
EDDIE LUCIO, JR.
DISTRICT 27**



Austin Capitol Office
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711
512-463-0127

Cameron District Office
800 N. Interstate 69E, Ste. 7
Brownsville, TX 78521
956-548-0227

Hidalgo District Office
1210 W Interstate 2, Ste. 10
Pharr, Texas 78577
956-787-5227

PRESS RELEASE: Sen. Lucio Announces Over \$1 billion in Federal Food Benefits for Texas Families

Funding helps families who rely on the reduced and free lunch programs impacted by COVID-19-related school closures

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wednesday, May 13, 2020

Contact: Daniel Esparza, Legislative Director

(512) 463-0127

AUSTIN, TX – Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr., (D-Brownsville) applauds the availability of over \$1 billion from the federal Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program to assist families who depend on reduced and free school meals for their schoolchildren who temporarily lost access to these meals due to COVID-19-related school closures.

"I am so thankful that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has given the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) approval to provide greatly needed food benefits to Texas families who rely on reduced and free school meals for their children," said Sen. Lucio, author of the Texas Summer Meals and Free School Breakfast Programs. Senator Lucio serves as Vice Chair of the influential Texas Senate Education Committee.

Texas families on reduced and free school meals will be assisted by a one-time benefit of \$285 per child by the P-EBT program. In a multi-agency effort, HHSC, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will coordinate and administer this pandemic assistance benefit which families will be able to use in a similar manner as individuals currently pay for groceries through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

"This federal assistance is timely as we enter into the summer months and our Texas families are in need of help to afford nutritious and healthy foods for their children," said Sen. Lucio.

As the Education Vice Chair, Sen. Lucio previously wrote to the commissioners heading up the state's education and agriculture agencies on April 22, and requested their specialized assistance to ensure that providing meals to children who depend on them remain a top priority in Texas during the summer.

"Since Texas families are struggling to live through a national emergency," Sen. Lucio wrote, "I am concerned that absent specific guidance on how state and federal law allow schools to continue serving meals during the summer (while integrating state social distancing guidelines) some school districts may, unfortunately, find themselves discouraged -- while others may fail -- to offer this vital resource to students in need."

"With the wellbeing of these students in mind, as author of the Texas Summer Meals program and Vice Chair of the Texas Senate Education Committee," the April 22nd correspondence states, "I humbly urge you to work together along with Governor Greg Abbott's Office to issue guidance to schools on steps they can take to continue meal service over the summer. With your guidance, they will receive the necessary assurance on how they can provide our Texas children this needed service in a way that complies with state and federal regulations, as well as with best practices in avoiding disease transmission."

The April correspondence continued, "In your leadership role of overseeing the administration of the National School Lunch Program across Texas, and overseeing the public education of Texas school children, I respectfully request that you seek all necessary waivers and authority from the federal government and state, to help as many children as possible this summer."

The Texas Senate Education Vice Chair concluded his April 22nd letter to Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath and Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, "I thank you in advance for continuing to work for the best interest of Texas families and the wellbeing of their children, especially the vulnerable students who need our help the most."

Commenting on the approval of the \$1 billion federal food benefit, Sen. Lucio went on to say, "With a deep passion of being an advocate for Texas children, and their best interest, I publicly thank Texas' three agencies leading this coordinated effort to provide families who depend on reduced or free school meals to have the needed resources to continue to provide nutritious and healthy meals for their children during these challenging times."

###

Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D – Brownsville) represents Cameron, Hidalgo, Kenedy, Kleberg, and Willacy Counties. He is the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Intergovernmental Relations; Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education; Member of the Senate Committees on State Affairs; Veteran Affairs & Border Security; and of the Select Committees on Redistricting; and, Texas Ports. He is member of the Sunset Advisory Commission and has been an ex-officio member of the DSHS Task Force of Border Public Health Officials since 2017. Elected in 1991, Lucio is third in seniority in the Texas Senate.