

USDA approves Massachusetts plan to join online EBT grocery purchase pilot

The Baker-Polito Administration announced today that Massachusetts received approval from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to move forward on participation in a pilot program that, once established, will allow households who receive food assistance benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to purchase groceries online with electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards. Massachusetts applied to participate in this federal pilot program on April 24th.

“Innovative options like this alongside the Administration’s investment of \$56 million to combat food insecurity based on the recommendations of the Commonwealth’s Food Security Task Force will go a long way to meeting the basic needs of families and individuals during this public health emergency,” said COVID-19 Command Center Director and Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders. “Federal SNAP benefits are a strong support for hundreds of thousands of people in the Commonwealth, and this pilot will expand safer grocery options for those individuals across the state.”

“Online EBT grocery purchasing promotes equity and safety for our residents receiving SNAP benefits, allowing low-income households access to the same purchasing choices as other shoppers. This approval is a key first step in making this critical option available to the families and individuals we serve,” said Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Commissioner Amy Kershaw. “We look forward to working with our partners to implement this new functionality as soon as possible.”

Implementing online EBT grocery purchasing in Massachusetts is one of the Massachusetts Food Security Task Force's recommendations to maximize federal resources for food and nutrition. The Task Force convened on April 22, 2020 to develop actionable solutions to address growing food insecurity among individuals and families across the Commonwealth due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Governor Baker on Sunday announced \$56 million in investments to initiate the Task Force's initial recommendations to combat food insecurity and address urgent needs.

Since the start of the public health emergency, applications for SNAP benefits have increased upwards of 400%, resulting in more than 80,000 new households now receiving SNAP.

Federal SNAP rules generally prohibit online purchases with an EBT card. In 2019, the USDA established a six-state pilot program to explore online SNAP EBT transactions for food purchases. In response to COVID-19, USDA has allowed additional states to apply to participate in the pilot program.

Now that approval has been received, DTA will work with the state's EBT vendor, Conduent, and the two retailers participating in the federal pilot program, Walmart and Amazon, to implement the state's plan as soon as possible.

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.

For more information related to DTA in light of COVID-19, visit <https://www.mass.gov/DTA/COVID-19>