



POLITICS

Children in Georgia are hungry. Nearly one-fourth don't have enough to eat.

Melissa Cruz USA TODAY

Dec. 23, 2024, 5:12 a.m. ET

Nearly one-fourth of children living in Georgia may go to bed hungry tonight, as food insecurity continues to rise across the state.

A new report from [Hunger Free America](#) found that 22.4% of children in Georgia – or 555,208 kids – live in households without enough food. Georgia now has the fourth highest rate of food insecurity among children in the nation.

The problem, advocates say, is exasperated in part by [Georgia's refusal](#) to participate in a federal food program that has greatly reduced food insecurity elsewhere in the country.

Georgia still weighing Summer EBT benefit

For many kids, summer tends to be the hungriest time of the year, when meals they would normally receive in school are no longer available. Georgia officials have until January 1, 2025, to decide whether the state will participate in a federally funded program that would alleviate some of that hunger.

[Summer EBT](#), also known as Sun Bucks, is a federal assistance program that gives eligible families \$40 per month per child to buy groceries while schools are closed during the summer. Over 1.1 million children in Georgia would [benefit](#) from the program, the Food Research and Action Center estimates.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture launched the program in 2024. But Georgia was one of 13 states that chose not to opt-in for the program's inaugural year, forfeiting around \$138 million in federal benefits.

Gov. Brian Kemp previously [said](#) that Georgia decided not to participate due to the program's "lack of nutrition standards and fiscal sustainability."

A spokesperson for the governor's office told USA TODAY that potential participation in 2025 is "currently still under review."

Other programs struggle to fill in the gaps

When Kemp rejected the 2024 Summer EBT funding, he said the state would focus on previously existing programs instead.

Georgia currently offers [Happy Helpings](#) and [Seamless Summer Option](#), both USDA-funded programs that run meal sites during the summer months, where children can pick up or eat free meals.

But many of the meal sites only operate between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Limited hours, coupled with transportation challenges, means only 13% of children that qualify for these free meals during the summer receive them, [reports](#) Capital B News.

Not all areas have meal sites either. Out of Georgia's 159 counties, 59 did not have Happy Helpings sites. Others end their operation before the summer break is over. According to Feeding Georgia, 585 sites – many of them with Seamless Summer – closed in July this year, weeks before the school year began.

Hunger is a problem across ages

Children account for roughly half of people who are food insecure in Georgia. But hunger is a problem across all ages.

The report from Hunger Free America found that in total, 1.1 million Georgia residents did not have enough food to eat over two one-week periods in August and September of 2024. And nearly 11% of employed adults and 9.5% of seniors lived in food insecure households in Georgia between 2021 and 2023.

Among other recommendations, the organization suggests restoring the expanded Child Tax Credit, strengthening food assistance programs, and funding universal school meals nationwide.

Will Georgians see those benefits? It's uncertain.

During [President-elect Trump's](#) last term, he proposed a drastic \$180 billion cut to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. If it had passed, the USDA estimated that some [700,000 Americans](#) would have lost their SNAP benefits. Trump has touted similar [plans](#) for his second term. Republicans have been [split](#) on other benefits, like expansion of the Child Tax Credit.

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