



# TENNESSEE CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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January 8, 2026

Governor Bill Lee  
State Capitol, 1st Floor  
600 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Blvd.  
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee,

The Tennessee Catholic Conference bringing the collective voice of the three Catholic bishops of the state strongly encourages you to apply for participation in the federal Summer EBT program for 2026.

Doing all that we can to ensure that no Tennesseans, particularly children, go hungry addresses core values that we share as Christians and as Americans.

As you know, Tennessee distributed Summer EBT nutrition benefits to over 700,000 Tennessee children during the summer of 2024. This research-based program protected them from the pangs of hunger during months when school meals were unavailable, promoted their health and prepared them for academic success when school resumed. In fact, it was with your leadership and the hard work of Commissioner Carter and his staff in the Department of Human Services, Tennessee was at the forefront of states implementing this new federal program. Tennessee's example encouraged our neighbors, including Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and North Carolina, to implement Summer EBT beginning in 2025.

As we have seen during the summer of 2025 when Tennessee did not participate in the EBT program and more recently during the shutdown of the federal government that stopped the flow of SNAP benefits, the most vulnerable are the ones who shoulder the burden of hunger. Despite the generosity of people across the state and the work of faith-based and other non-profit agencies, the need for food assistance is simply too great to meet at our level.

At a time when inflation in food prices burdens so many households, the Summer EBT could serve as a lifeline for families statewide. We are confident that, for you as for us, the primary considerations are moral. It is rare that the state is offered an opportunity that so clearly alleviates child suffering, and at minimal state cost. We therefore encourage you to make the compassionate choice, as you have before, to alleviate child hunger by rejoining the Summer EBT program.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend J. Mark Spalding  
Bishop of Nashville

Most Reverend David P. Talley  
Bishop of Memphis

Most Reverend Mark Beckman  
Bishop of Knoxville

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Tennessee Catholic Conference