Governor Ron DeSantis and the Department of Children and Families Announce Extended Support to Floridians Participating in SNAP and TANF

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DCF has also made workforce adjustments and instituted a series of policy initiatives to simplify the application process to provide timely benefits to Florida Families

Tallahassee, Fla. – Today, Governor Ron DeSantis and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) announced the extension of good cause for the month of May and the submission of a federal waiver, to assist Floridians participating in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) during the current public health emergency. Following initial approval from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), SNAP recipients' maximum monthly allotment (based on household size) will be increased for the month of May. Once approved, current SNAP recipients will receive this additional benefit amount automatically.

"With nearly three million Floridians participating in SNAP alone, I'm confident that these policy initiatives are in our state's best interest – they will help us safely and gradually re-establish normalcy and ultimately allow families to thrive post-COVID-19," **said Governor DeSantis.** "These timely and proactive efforts taken by DCF helps ensure the good people of Florida have access to the support and resources they need."

"It's clear that the Governor is working tirelessly to help Floridians impacted by COVID-19, while also flattening the curve and planning a safe reopening of the state. But until that day comes – and it will – DCF is prepared to continue providing the financial support our family, friends, and neighbors needed to make it through this time of unprecedented stress and strain," **said DCF Secretary Chad Poppell.** "We're grateful of the support of USDA and we look forward to continued collaboration with our state and federal partners throughout the duration of the pandemic and beyond."

At Governor DeSantis' direction and DCF Secretary Chad Poppell's leadership the Economic Self-Sufficiency (ESS) program made necessary adjustments to the workforce, including repurposing over 1,300 current employees to manage the increased call volume and process the surge of new applications. Since declaring a public health emergency, DCF has received nearly one million public assistance applications and peaked call volume more than doubled. To date, ESS has processed nearly 70 percent of those applications. To assist with increased call volume, UnitedHealthcare – as part of the company's generous donation and display of corporate stewardship – deployed one hundred call center agents to assist the ESS Customer Call Center bringing the total number of available call agents to 1,000 by the end of April. As a direct result of these changes, ESS is responding to more customers quickly and payments are being received within an average of two weeks, which is well below federal standards.

Additionally, under Governor DeSantis' direction, DCF instituted a series of waivers and policy initiatives, to provide additional assistance to Florida families, including:

- Temporarily increased SNAP recipients' benefit amount in March and April to the maximum monthly allotment based on household size. The Governor has directed DCF to request a waiver to extend this increase for May. Customers who are already receiving the maximum allotment will not receive an increase.
- Implementing a six-month recertification extension for clients scheduled to recertify for benefits in April and May.
- Expanded the capacity to allow Floridians to file for benefits telephonically with 800-1000 individuals taking advantage of this opportunity daily.
- Effectively partnered with the Department of Economic Opportunity to temporarily apply good cause statewide for TANF & SNAP recipients subject to participate in mandatory work requirements for March, April and now May as a condition to receive benefits.
- Participating in the USDA's pilot program to allow SNAP recipients to purchase groceries online using their Electronic Benefits Transfer

(EBT) card.
- Developing a plan to implement Pandemic EBT – a supplemental benefit for households with children who receive free and reduced lunch – to serve more than three million children. The plan will be shared with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for joint submission to USDA for federal approval.

For more information, please visit: https://www.myflfamilies.com/covid19/access.shtml.

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