

The MS people are in dire need of help. We can't fight this alone. -Mallery

Do Better.

Hungry.

Need a place to lay down and somewhere to call home. -Danea

Continue to give families P-EBT until this pandemic is over with. -Bobbie

COVID-19 Pandemic

HELP.

The more this goes on, the harder it will be to catch up or we will all fall behind completely. -Anonymous

need help covering food and utilities...

Jobless.

Listen.

\$95 in unemployment cannot cover rent necessities etc.

Please Help...

Please help us. -Steve

It hurts because I can't feed my kids. No one is helping me. No one. I feel helpless. -Ivy

MISSISSPIANS

Pandemic.

STRUGGLING

We matter.

TO SURVIVE

-Lakeshia

BASICS OF FOOD, RENT, AND UTILITIES NEEDED MOST

# OVERVIEW

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From August 28 to September 7, 2020, the SouthStrong campaign surveyed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants in 12 Southern states. The surveys used to collect the data shared in this report were written and analyzed by the Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP), and the conclusions and calls to action belong to SPLC Action Fund, Hope Policy Institute, Mississippi Center for Justice, Mississippi Low Income Childcare Initiative, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Mississippi, Together for Hope Delta, and Children's Defense Fund.

The data analyzed here rely on self-reported information from 297 anonymized surveys in Mississippi. Respondents were invited to answer a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions about challenges and changes in the wake of the pandemic, experiences using and applying for government benefits, and recommendations and requests for policymakers. Respondents were invited, but not required, to share their first names to be attached to quotes you see here.

The surveys were administered by Propel ([www.joinpropel.com](http://www.joinpropel.com)), the operators of a financial services app, Fresh EBT ([www.freshebt.com](http://www.freshebt.com)). Fresh EBT, used by over 4 million households, is a smartphone app available at no cost to SNAP participants to track and manage SNAP and TANF benefits. The survey, designed by SEAP, was made available through Fresh EBT to randomly selected individuals who opened the app between August 28 – September 7, 2020.

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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Finding #1: Food insecurity and child care issues have been the top challenges in the pandemic.

Finding #2: Government aid made a real difference for many families...but much of it has expired.

Finding #3: Help with food, housing, and utilities are needed now.



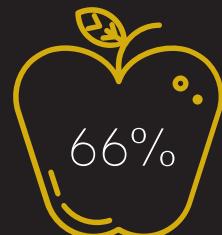
# FINDING #1: FOOD INSECURITY AND CHILD CARE ISSUES HAVE BEEN THE TOP CHALLENGES IN THE PANDEMIC.

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**66%** of these struggling Mississippians have had trouble buying enough food at some point during the pandemic. Child care issues were the second most frequently mentioned challenge, followed closely by job loss. Respondents talked about the burden of higher food prices, hours being cut from their jobs, depression, and stress.

## TOP 3 CHALLENGES SINCE THE PANDEMIC BEGAN

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Trouble Buying Enough Food



29%

Loss of Job



32%

Childcare Issues

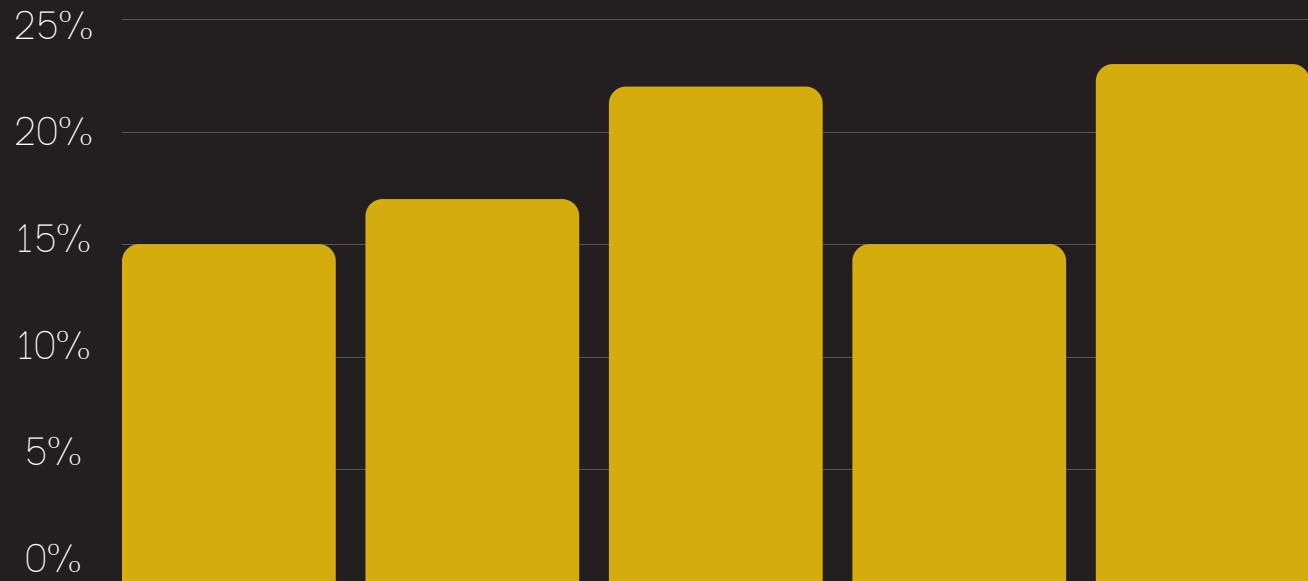
# FINDING #1: CONTINUED

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More than half of respondents (57%) have had problems applying for or receiving at least one type of assistance (UI, stimulus check, SNAP, P-EBT, Medicaid). Of the 12 Southern states surveyed, Mississippi was the only state to have SNAP and P-EBT application issues as the greatest challenges. All other Southern states had problems with unemployment insurance or stimulus checks as the top challenge. The share of Mississippi respondents who had problems applying for or receiving SNAP was 10 percentage points higher than the share for all Southern respondents (23% vs. 13%).

57% HAD PROBLEMS APPLYING TO OR RECEIVING AT  
LEAST ONE TYPE OF AID

HAD A PROBLEM WITH:



Unemployment Insurance      Stimulus Checks      SNAP      Medicaid      P-EBT

# THE VOICES OF THE IMPACTED

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Not being able to work due to my child not being able to attend school. Not having enough funds to provide food is a struggle every day. Not knowing if you'll have enough funds to pay your bills is an all night worry.

—Mallery in Mississippi

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Hours were cut down to 5 hours a week at my job. Currently behind on rent.

—S.K. in Mississippi

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Power went up, water went up and I have been served with 2 different eviction notices... how are we supposed to apply for any services if everything was shut down.

How do we get help.  
—Margaret

# FINDING #2: GOVERNMENT AID MADE A REAL DIFFERENCE FOR MANY FAMILIES...BUT MUCH OF IT HAS EXPIRED

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In spite of challenges applying for or receiving certain aid, **51%** of respondents said programs or assistance made a real difference for them and their family in managing the pandemic. Food assistance programs were the most frequently mentioned programs. Stimulus checks and unemployment insurance were the two other most frequently mentioned programs. While helpful, much of the aid has expired or will expire soon.



FAMILY AND FRIENDS ARE  
A SOURCE OF SUPPORT  
FOR

**60%**

OF THESE STRUGGLING  
MISSISSIPPIANS.

# THE VOICES OF THE IMPACTED

What has made a real difference?

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The utility service has been kind enough to wait for payments and not cut off our services.

-Joyce

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SNAP. We would not be eating without it.

-Margaret

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Unemployment when we finally got it started.

-Haley

# FINDING #3: HELP WITH THE BASICS OF FOOD, HOUSING, AND UTILITIES ARE NEEDED NOW

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Overwhelmingly, these struggling Mississippians said they cannot pay for housing, electricity, water, and food due to job loss, wage cuts, and loss of work hours. At the same time, they spoke again and again about food price increases, rent increases, and higher utilities due to being at home more. Covid-19 support and relief was the top concern.

WORRIED THAT YOU MAY NOT HAVE STABLE  
HOUSING IN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS?

**59%**  
**YES**

## WHAT ISSUES ARE YOU MOST CONCERNED ABOUT?

Covid-19 Support and Relief 73%

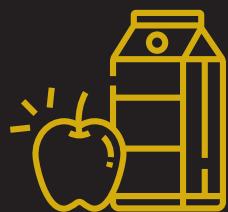
Economy/Jobs 55%

Education 49%

Housing 44%

Healthcare 41%

YOUR STATE HAS MONEY TO SPEND TO HELP PEOPLE IN THE PANDEMIC. WHICH OF THESE WOULD BE MOST USEFUL?  
TOP THREE RESPONSES



FOOD ASSISTANCE



HELP PAYING UTILITIES



HELP WITH RENT

Please bring back extra unemployment benefits for those like me who can't work because of having multiple kids online schooling at one time and no child care. \$95 in unemployment cannot cover rent necessities etc. Please help us. -Steve

We matter. -Lakeshia

It hurts because I can't feed my kids. No one is helping me. No one. I feel helpless. -Ivy

# WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

The MS people are in dire need of help. We can't fight this alone.  
-Mallery

Continue to give families P-EBT until this pandemic is over with. -Bobbie

Need a place to lay down and somewhere to call home.  
-Danea

We need help covering food and utilities. With jobs cutting hours, we are not able to keep up with things. The more this goes on the harder it will be to catch up or we will all fall behind completely.

-Anonymous