

Evers has deal with feds to save \$70M a month in food stamp aid

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Gov. Tony Evers says his administration has reached a deal with the federal government to ensure Wisconsin won't lose out on some \$70 million a month in food stamps funding.

The announcement comes after a state Supreme Court ruling jeopardized the money by overturning Evers' latest COVID-19 public health declaration. The federal government had required states to have such an order in place to qualify for the enhanced funding.

But in a deal with the Biden administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has agreed to accept an emergency declaration from DHS Secretary Karen Timberlake directing her agency to continue taking steps to address the pandemic.

Those orders include leading vaccination efforts, procuring and providing testing, and assisting local officials with contact tracing.

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Prior to the announcement, Evers had hinted to reporters that his administration had found a "workaround" after the state Supreme Court ruling.

The state was slated to start losing the enhanced federal aid in May.

"More than \$70 million a month means we can get support to a lot of folks across our state who are still struggling in the midst of a pandemic and need help putting food on the table," Evers said.

The gov's office said the USDA today agreed to accept Timberlake's declaration to qualify for the federal funds. Timberlake's order was signed Thursday.

Under the gov's previous health emergencies, including the one struck down last month, the state was receiving \$57.5 million in increased benefits for approximately 255,000 households each month. The federal government has also increased how much some of the poorest qualifiers for the aid can receive, adding another \$13.5 million a month in benefits.

Sherrie Tussler, executive director of the Hunger Task Force in Milwaukee, said it was a blow when the Wisconsin Supreme Court struck down the gov's public health declaration, threatening the enhanced federal aid. But the state of Michigan issued an order similar to Timberlake's that helped qualify that state for the enhanced aid. The Evers administration had also reached an agreement with the federal government ahead of the Supreme Court's March 31 ruling giving the state a two-month extension of the benefits. That gave the state until May to figure out another approach, and the Biden administration had been working to find alternatives for states to qualify for the money if their emergency orders lapsed.

Tussler said she didn't see a legislative fix to the situation as an option.

"I figured we'd go until the end of May, and that was the time we had to convince people to come to their senses and do this," she said.

See Timberlake's order:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/210413Order.pdf>