

# **LFB: Overturning Evers' public health declaration would end millions in food stamps for low-income Wisconsin families**

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Overturning Gov. Tony Evers' public health declaration would strip the state of enhanced federal funding for food stamps, denying low-income Wisconsin families millions of dollars in assistance, according to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau.

The LFB said for January, the Department of Health Services estimates 242,507 households will receive emergency federal benefits totaling more than \$49.3 million. That amounts to about \$203 per household.

Rep. Evan Goyke, D-Milwaukee, requested the LFB memo on the eve of the Assembly voting to sign off on a resolution from the state Senate that would overturn Evers' public health declaration and the latest mask mandate he issued. The resolution, which Evers can't veto, passed the Senate 18-13 on Tuesday.

The Assembly was scheduled to be on the floor at 9 a.m. to take up the resolution.

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"The loss of federal revenue shouldn't overshadow the potential human loss repealing the mask mandate may bring, but it does show that the authors and proponents of the resolution are acting only with partisan political motives and have pushed forward without doing the basic homework that any public official should do when advancing public policy," Goyke said.

Sen. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, co-authored the resolution and wasn't aware of the issue until late yesterday, a spokesman said. The lawmaker was looking at options

to address the issue, including adding an amendment to the COVID-19 bill that the Senate is scheduled to take up today that could keep the state eligible for the enhanced food stamp benefits. Nass believes the Assembly should still move forward with a vote on the resolution, the spokesman said.

Meanwhile, an Evers spokeswoman slammed Republicans for trying to overturn the public health emergency in light of the impact on low-income Wisconsinites.

“Republicans are poised to end Wisconsin’s only remaining statewide strategy to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and save lives while ~243,000 Wisconsin households could lose nearly \$50 million in food assistance—all because they’re upset about @GovEvers’ authority,” Britt Cudaback wrote on Twitter.

According to the LFB memo, FoodShare benefits are typically based on a sliding scale that takes into account factors such as the number of people in a household as well as income in determining the maximum benefit. Emergency allotments take households to the maximum benefit based solely on size.

Congress approved legislation last year allowing states to request emergency allotments to households for the program to address “temporary food needs,” and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has granted states emergency allotments if they’ve issued an emergency or disaster declaration.

Evers issued the first public health declaration related to the pandemic in March. Under state law, such a declaration can last 60 days unless lawmakers extend it through a resolution. The Legislature didn’t extend Evers’ original order, and he has issued three more since then. Each has been the foundation for the mask mandates that he began in July.

Republicans have argued Evers has exceeded his constitutional power and that guvs can only issue one public health emergency related to the pandemic. Evers has countered each declaration deals with a situation unique to the pandemic and is therefore allowed. The state Supreme Court heard arguments and is expected to soon rule on the issue.

Wisconsin qualified for the enhanced benefits after Evers declared the first public health emergency in March to deal with COVID-19 with families collecting the extra money in April and May. But after that initial declaration expired and lawmakers didn’t extend it, the state was ineligible for the benefit in June.

Between July and December, after Evers again issued a public health declaration, Wisconsin families collected \$260.2 million, according to the Department of Health Services. The number of households impacted each month varied from 205,345 to 239,257.

The LFB said a projection for how much Wisconsin families might qualify for in February isn't available because caseloads fluctuate each month.

[Read the LFB memo.](#)