

Hungry. Having a food bank. —John in
Check on poor people. We are not
okay. —Negan in Alabama

REAL

people. voices. stories.

IN THEIR WORDS
THE NEED FOR COVID-19
RELIEF IN THE SOUTH

INTRODUCTION

From August 28 to September 7, 2020, the SouthStrong campaign surveyed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants in 12 Southern states. The surveys were written and analyzed by the Southern Economic Advancement Project ([SEAP](#)) and were administered by [Propel](#), the operators of a financial services app, [Fresh EBT](#). 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. More than 2,300 Southerners responded. This quote book shares some of the many open-ended responses about challenges and changes in the wake of the pandemic and recommendations and requests for policymakers. A full report of the data can be downloaded [here](#).

CHALLENGES IN THE PANDEMIC

Money for gas to get to school where food was given out.

-Teresa in South Carolina

Lost so much and fell behind on all my bills.

-Patricia in Kentucky

Have not received stimulus check yet. And unemployment just stopped and cannot reach anybody thru phone or email. They do not return calls or emails.

-Robert in Georgia

I lost my home due to losing my job. I have a new job but still homeless.

-SG in South Carolina

Families with children are at a complete loss because at least one parent must remain home to care for the kids but that is a huge hit in income with nothing to replace it.

- Emma in Kentucky

Gig worker, I got zero unemployment, because...Florida.

-Gerald in Florida

Call centers very busy, not enough agents to assist, some agents have no knowledge at all, miscommunication, very slow processing times.

-Ivan in Florida

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

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

-S.K. in Mississippi

I'm off work without pay, and I still have bills and kids to provide for.

-Karnasta in Alabama

Not able to pay light bill and water bill, car insurance.

-Torie in Florida

Staying on time with rent, dealing with my children being out of school, and not being able to keep my job.

-Monica in Georgia

I lost two of my three jobs and I'm still struggling.

-Mia in Kentucky

It's just hard to survive.

-Kamili in North Carolina

Can't work because I have no one to watch my children during this pandemic.

-Nica in Mississippi

CHALLENGES IN THE PANDEMIC

I have been waiting for a response from unemployment for over two months. Out of work with no income and no work. I have applied everywhere and anywhere.

-Diana in Georgia

I have not received my stimulus check and I'm having a hard time contacting the PUA hotline to speak to a representative...I just received my benefits after about 2 months of waiting which is not okay when you have a 1 year old.

-P.B. in Kentucky

Took over 2 months to get approved which caused me to get 2 months behind on rent. Therefore I almost got evicted.

-J.K. in North Carolina

Hungry.

-Jeremiah in Mississippi

I am about to lose my home. I'm a single mother of two children. I have taken a pay cut and I'm trying to work as many hours as I can. I'm behind on all my bills, and will be homeless with my children if I can't catch up.

-Holly in North Carolina

Got sick for 3 months, lost my morning job, hours got cut at my night job, my car broke down for 4 months, bills piling up on me!!

-Kamesha in South Carolina

Lost the place I was staying at because I didn't have any money coming in. Couldn't work because the schools were closed and I didn't have childcare.

-Ginni in North Carolina

11 week wait for benefits. Having to constantly call and email several people over and over without response.

-Candace in Alabama

It took months to get unemployment payments. Wasn't able to receive food assistance until after I'd become homeless.

-Jared in Florida

It's a struggle to get enough hours to pay my rent and utilities.

-Victoria in South Carolina

I was denied for benefits. They were saying I left for personal reasons. My children were my personal reason.

-Candace in Mississippi

MOST HELPFUL RELIEF

Extra SNAP: Those of us already on a very fixed income are having a hard time. Until SNAP went up it was buy meds or eat.

-Eva in Arkansas

Extra SNAP: The increase I received for food stamps. It was the only bright spot in all of this.

-Tammy in Georgia

Extra SNAP: EBT increase has been a Godsend. The \$194 a month almost gets me through the entire month with food costs. It's too bad that we won't get to continue this level of support. I'm not the only person who goes hungry more days than not with \$14 to \$44 dollars a month in EBT benefits normally.

-Carolyn in South Carolina

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

-Joyce in Mississippi

SNAP: We never went hungry.

-SG in South Carolina

UI & P-EBT: Definitely unemployment when they were doing the extra \$600. While I was getting it, I was able to catch up on bills. P-EBT helped as well so I could put food on the table.

-Dnai in North Carolina

SNAP: We would not be eating without it.

-Margaret in Mississippi

Extra SNAP & P-EBT: Helping us by giving us the max benefit and extra money for my son's school lunches that he would have gotten. They were the only ones who cared about us.

-Katelyn in Tennessee

Come out and speak with us so you can see the struggle and feel our pain especially those with children.

-Jerri in Alabama

Let go of the money, people need help real bad. **-Willie in Arkansas**

We can't wait on you to make up your mind to do the right thing we are losing our homes and jobs now.

-Kaycee in Florida

Check on poor people. We are not okay.

-Meggan in Alabama

To stop thinking of only the rich people because all us lower Americans having to fight for the help.

-Jenifer in Arkansas

Treat people how you would like to be treated.

-Mack in Florida

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

LISTEN TO US AND SHOW UP FOR PEOPLE

Be there for the aged and elderly.

-Joseph in Florida

Take the money out of your own pockets that the citizens pay you to work for them and give it to those who really need it. **-EG in Florida**

While normal working Americans are suffering and selling off all they work for, it appears lifetime politicians continue cashing in although they cannot negotiate a bill for a stoplight let alone one for millions of Americans out there.

-Patricia in Arkansas

Help, send surveys to houses. Try to see people's problem.

-Kelly in Florida

To help those who are truly in need! Homeless and low income families! We all truly need extra help. **-Natasha in Florida**

People who are unemployed want to work... finding a job is hard as hell!!!

-Jennifer in Florida

Continue the programs while the pandemic is still in effect.

-Kenshea in Georgia

It's so sad how you have let us down. While you get richer, we grow poorer.

-W. in Georgia

We are still in a crisis.

-Shakia in Florida

Stop dragging your feet on everything!!

-Amy in Florida

Do BETTER for your people.

-Sam in Florida

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

LISTEN TO US AND SHOW UP FOR PEOPLE

Work together. No Democrat or Republican party lines.

-Timothy in Florida

Just put yourself in our shoes. Being a parent trying to make ends meet during a deadly pandemic. I've lost 3 family members since the pandemic and now I'm currently [in] self isolation.

-Berlyne in Florida

Help the low income families and not a stupid football stadium.

-Briana in Florida

Help us single mother that have to stay home with their young children to do their schooling on line. **-Paula in Florida**

Help the people who are still working but have lost second and third jobs that were keeping them above water. Not just unemployed.

-Mia in Kentucky

Help is needed directly in the pockets of the American people.

-Janie in Louisiana

We matter.

-Lakeshia in Mississippi

Families with children are at a complete loss because at least one parent must remain home to care for the kids but that is a huge hit in income with nothing to replace it.

-Emma in Kentucky

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

-Mallery in Mississippi

People are doing the best they can and still struggle to make ends meet.

-Paula in Tennessee

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

LISTEN TO US AND SHOW UP FOR PEOPLE

Come out to the community and check on people.

-Patricia in Louisiana

Quit spending so much money on the roads when people are losing places to live and can't afford to pay their rent.

-Lisa in West Virginia

Please help those of us who aren't able to find work. We have kids and families that depend on us. I'm ready to re-enter the workforce, but the gates are partially open. We need help.

-Sheena in Florida

To give enough money to hold everybody until they can go back to their job.

-Lynette in Kentucky

We all depend on each other. Even though every situation has been different we have all been affected. "I'll at least listen" means a lot.

-Leza in Tennessee

Financial assistance for struggling families going from 2 incomes to only 1.

-Cynthia in Virginia

Life shouldn't be this hard in America.

-Anna in Virginia

Stop worrying about the stupid stuff and worry more about how the people that live paycheck to paycheck are going to survive when we can't jump through these ridiculous hoops you have in place to get assistance.

-Bridgette in Tennessee

You wait too long to send help that by the time we get it, we're so far behind.

-Liane in South Carolina

Nothing that they don't already know. We're struggling here.

-Reene in South Carolina

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

LISTEN TO US AND SHOW UP FOR PEOPLE

The world is in a crisis. We all need help to survive or we will die.

-T. in Tennessee

Quit spending so much money on the roads when people are losing places to live and can't afford to pay their rent.

-Lisa in West Virginia

Not enough jobs for how many people are unemployed. People are losing everything's. Record lows since the great depression for some companies. We simply can't find work, and we can't supplement income ourselves. It's a pandemic.

-Amanda in Louisiana

You have the funds to help. Why not help?

-Paulette in Tennessee

We in small towns need more help.

-Carolyn in South Carolina

Babies are going without.

-Vanessa in Tennessee

CARE! Don't just talk about it, be about it. If you really care about us as citizens, don't evict people and their children, help with utilities, just be there for us! We're not animals, we're human beings and we didn't ask for this to happen to us. Now that we need help, you all aren't doing your part. **-Sara in Kentucky**

They need to act as if they are actually suffering like we the people are. They don't seem to care because it seems they are not being mentally, physically, financially, etc effected as we are. **-Breanna in Louisiana**

Help us. **-Tonita in Tennessee**

We need help now. We are hopeless and suffering. **-Wileen in Georgia**

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

LISTEN TO US AND SHOW UP FOR PEOPLE

Help!!!
We are suffering!!
-Nicolea in South Carolina

Listen to your people and actually hear what we're saying.
-Ashley in Georgia

While you are out shopping for groceries with your family, think about families like so many who have to divide up the 40 dollars left to their names between groceries and hygiene. I mean really think about it because that's how we live. It's not just our imagination. It's real to us. **-Jennifer in Louisiana**

Everyone isn't as blessed financially as others and if the money is there...help us. It's pretty selfish to have more than enough and not care if anyone else has anything or not. Get it together KENTUCKY, we're better than this! **-Cheryl in Kentucky**

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

STIMULUS CHECK

We need that second stimulus check. Families like mine are struggling very bad. Without it we will not make it. Please please get us the second stimulus check quickly and any other help possible.

-Audrey in Kentucky

A second round of stimulus checks to help purchase food, pay bills and rent.

-Alabama Resident

Send the next stimulus check, people that are still continuously working need hazard pay, just some form of help!

-Alabama Resident

The sick and elderly were struggling to survive before the pandemic. We need as much assistance as possible now more than ever.

-Lee in Arkansas

We need another stimulus or something similar. We took a huge paycut from working 5-6 days a week to 2 maybe 3 days a week. It's so rough right now. We have to pay bills and they've gotten so far behind, catching up will be horrible. Thanks for letting us voice our opinions.

-Brittany in Louisiana

Monthly stimulus payments until this pandemic is over would help the most!

-Lydia in Tennessee

You need to give everyone... one big payment... Based on the family size and person and I am talking about enough of money so we all can get back on track.

-Dominique in Florida

Push Congress to pass a new stimulus check.

-Tiffany in Louisiana

We who are disabled deserve better treatment thru this situation.

-Clinton in Florida

Another stimulus check bigger than the last one. \$1200 to last for five months is nothing.

-Sandra in Georgia

I am behind 3 months on my mortgage and 2 months on my truck payment, another stimulus check would help me get back on my feet. I lost my job and just recently found a new one.

-Allison in Georgia



WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

HOUSING AND UTILITIES

Mortgage relief. I'm concerned about where the money will come from when my loan servicer wants all the payments I've missed. I can't afford to pay it since the unemployment is so low and we lost the \$600/week.

-Shannon in Louisiana

Please help us. We're struggling to pay rent and bills so the 2nd stimulus check will be a great help.

-Amy in Florida

Please extend the prohibition of eviction because I am behind on my mortgage and afraid of losing my home.

-Janet in Florida

Stop evictions!!! **-Amy in Alabama**

Things have been harder not being able to afford electricity for my house. When working, it was easier. Is there any relief to help Virginians? It's ready to get cold outside. **-Sarah in Virginia**

Please help people keep their homes.

-Nichole in South Carolina

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

-Danea in Mississippi

That we either need jobs or money for food, rent, utilities and other needs!! Can't take away both and expect people to live!!! **-Kathren in Arkansas**

Pls cut the pay of utility/rent.

Us lower class or self-employed even small business owners are all still having a lot of trouble getting on our feet.

-Amanda in Florida

Rent forgiveness. I'm very afraid I'm not going to get caught up in time, and my daughter & I will be homeless. We battled homelessness from 2012- 2015.

I never want to experience that again & I definitely don't want my 8 yr to ever know what that's like.

-Ruth in Virginia

Help with keeping lights on and running water and keeping car insurance so I can look for work.

-Torie in Florida



WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

HOUSING AND UTILITIES

I need to find help with my electric and water. I need help bad. Husband lost his job due to covid19 and has not found another yet due to his age and health. If I ever get caught up, I will be okay with the bills.

-Marsha in Kentucky

To please help with rent, light, and water. **-Jessica in Florida**

Rent relief or more funds to help aid those of us struggling! If I was not jobless due to covid, I would have to quit to help my kids do their school stuff. **-Casey in Virginia**

Helping get utilities caught up.

-Ashley in Alabama

Completely stop any evictions and disruption of electricity and free WiFi for these kids for school.

-Michelle in Florida

We have scared families in Jacksonville including my family, that are facing homelessness and loss of work. We need help.

-Melissa in Florida

Extra funds to help disabled people pay these highly rising utilities. At least once.

-Priscilla in West Virginia

Rent forgiveness. I'm very afraid I'm not going to get caught up in time, and my daughter & I will be homeless. We battled homelessness from 2012- 2015. I never want to experience that again & I definitely don't want my 8 yr to ever know what that's like.

-Ruth in Virginia

That they need to help people who don't have the basic utilities. We cannot afford to get our water on and the only places who help don't help with turning it on.

-Roni in Georgia

We need help financially so we don't have to worry about our light and water getting cut off and getting thrown out our homes with nowhere to go.

-Michelle in Georgia



WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

We need the extra \$400 unemployment to survive. **-Brittany in Alabama**

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. **-Steive in Mississippi**

Make unemployment last longer and be greater in value. **-Heather in Florida**

Continue extra pay for unemployment. **-Pamela in Georgia**

Because my kids are at home now and I was not called back to my job at the hospital yet because of the pandemic, it has been very hard. If you bring back the federal pandemic benefits, it would help 10 times everything else. I was able to pay my bills. **-Chanti in Georgia**

Not just for me but millions who will be unemployed for an extended time, they need an extension on UI benefits. SNAP extension has given me a realistic food budget that I did not have before. **-Nicole in Florida**

To be able to receive the PUA unemployment so I could try to go back to living as a normal family.

-Charity in West Virginia

I need unemployment because I can't work due to my children being out of school. **-Cherea in Virginia**

Please...I'm begging you for help. Please get unemployment increased. \$125 weekly is so poor. Please, Governor DeSantis.

-Wendy in Florida

Stop taking so long with unemployment. **-Crystal in Arkansas**

Raise unemployment and extend coverage. No one after losing job can afford Cobra. Mine is \$900 a month. How can I pay rent or anything else? **-Patricia in Florida**

My rent is \$500 but I only get \$175 for my unemployment so I'm just having a mental breakdown every other day and my blood pressure is through the roof. I just want a good job and to be able to eat and pay all my bills.

-Kira in Louisiana

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

FOOD ASSISTANCE

We need help with 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 in Mississippi**

To give a little more in food stamps because the pricing of food went up so much that it's hard to keep food for a month with just \$194 for one person.

-Diania in West Virginia

Continue to give families PEBT until this pandemic is over with.

-Bobbie in Mississippi



People are struggling out here... even with the max benefits per month. Food has gotten so expensive. **-Kia in Virginia**

Having enough money to feed my family. I go to a food bank and EBT and it still barely gets me by!

-Allison in North Carolina

It hurts cause I can't feed my kids. No one is helping me. No one. I feel helpless. **-Ivy in Mississippi**

I would ask them to please feed the people and make sure nobody goes without necessities during this horrific pandemic. We are in a health crisis and need all the help that we can get to stay healthy during this time.

-Tonya in Virginia

Food and cash assistance. Since covid things have been really tight. I'm not even sure what I'm going to do about food this week. With my kids being home more food used which leads me to run out rather quickly. I received P-ebt but it isn't enough.

-Taylor in Kentucky

Increase the EBT benefits until this pandemic is over. **-Margaret in South Carolina**

Please continue to help us with the extra money and food stamps because during this time prices are crazy out here. People are charging higher prices than usual. **-Betty in North Carolina**

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Keep giving senior citizens the \$194.00 in food stamps. It's hard to buy nutrition on \$16.00. **-Kathy in Georgia**

They need to have more places where you can get help, if you do not have a car. We need help with food and other things, but we can't get there. We have no car. **-Tonya in Florida**

Folks who are receiving food assistance, with and without children in their households, need extra help. Households without children are now caring for children and there isn't any assistance to get that added help. The households with children don't see enough to make 3 meals a day, 7 days a week. This is not acceptable.

-Leslie in Arkansas



Keep the extra food stamps coming. I'm diabetic and it does help. **-Cathy in Georgia**

Grocery prices increased. Seniors can't afford groceries.

-Shirley in Florida

To keep extra food stamps going until the pandemic is over.

-Arkansas Resident

Please extend our SNAP benefits till covid is lot better. Some of us have no job due to covid. The jobs available are part time, less money...Try living off \$368.00. Not enough for basic bills so extra SNAP benefits was a big help and relief during this time. Please extend. We need any help. Hoping this all goes away soon. Thank you.

-Debra in Florida

Please if we can stay with the maximum amount each month until the coronavirus is over, that will be helpful. Not everyone is working their full time hours. **-Clarissa in Florida**

We aren't in this together, if we are struggling and hungry. **-Candy in Alabama**

WHAT I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

CHILDCARE

Provide free childcare during pandemic and a monthly payment for families that are truly struggling to pay rent and other obligations like a car note.

-Kasey in Florida

Help with childcare expenses!!
Or allow parents to be home with their children!

-Sara in Alabama



Help with child care because I had to quit my job to stay at home with my kids.

-Lorinda in Georgia

Childcare, how can we work and we have no one to take care of our children. Some people have no family nor friends to help.

-Jade in Georgia

SOUTHSTRONG

PEOPLE FIRST. EQUITY CENTERED