

Appeal for aid on behalf of needy

Church groups, nonprofits request extension of Texas program providing food assistance

By Robert Downen

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As thousands of people waited in line people waited in line for special emergency food assistance, Houston-area church leaders and nonprofit groups Friday demanded that Gov. Greg Abbott and others extend the application deadline for Texans who suffered because of Hurricane Harvey.



People complete paperwork Friday to apply for assistance through the Disaster Supplemental Program, or D-SNAP, at the George R. Brown Convention Center. The program supplies one-time emergency food aid. Photo: Jon Shapley/Houston Chronicle

Storm victims waited for hours to apply for the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program --also known as D-SNAP --that provides one-time, emergency food aid for those devastated by natural disasters.

"I'm reminded of the great miracle of Jesus feeding 5,000," said Sam Dunning, of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. "We have the opportunity as a community to do the right thing by extending this deadline. The needs of people, children, the elderly and all in between cannot be constrained by deadlines artificially set by man."

The deadline for the program, which provides cards that can be used only for food and drinks but not alcohol or tobacco, was 7 p.m. Friday.

At a news conference in east Houston, Dunning pleaded for Abbott and other lawmakers to extend the program, calling the thousands left hungry “nothing short of a travesty.”

Others at the news conference, hosted by The Metropolitan Organization, said they believe thousands of people have not gotten help and could overload local churches and other nonprofits.

“People tend to look to the churches as the ideal place to get answers,” said the Rev. Simon Bautista, of Houston’s Christ Church Cathedral. “It puts a lot of pressure on our shoulders, and it is hard to tell people, ‘We’re sorry, we cannot help you with much.’ ”



Thousands wait in line to apply for emergency food aid, the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits are pegged to the size of the household requesting assistance. Photo: Jon Shapley

More than 200,000 people have received D-SNAP funds in Harris County since the program opened Sept. 22, according to preliminary numbers.

Those who qualify receive benefits on a Lone Star Card, which is used to provide food stamps under the regular SNAP program in Texas. To qualify for the D-SNAP benefits, a family must live in a county declared a federal disaster area, have experienced loss of income or home and not receive regular SNAP food benefits.

Through the program, families receive amounts equal to two months of the maximum SNAP benefits for their household size, which range from \$192 a month for one person to \$760 for a family of five, plus \$144 for each additional person.

The state health department, which oversees the program, said Wednesday that getting people food assistance has been its main focus for the last two weeks.

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