

# ***SUN Bucks: North Carolina's Newest Food Assistance Program***

*Informational Webinar for Child Welfare Staff  
Spring 2024*



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**



# AGENDA

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1. **Welcome and Introductions (5 min)**
2. **Child Food Insecurity in North Carolina (5 min)**
3. **Overview of New SUN Bucks Program (10 min)**
4. **Reminders for Child Welfare Staff (15 min)**
5. **How You Can Help (5 min)**
6. **Q&A Session (20 min)**

## Facilitators



**Cynthia Ervin**

*Assistant Director, Division of Child and Family Well-Being, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services*



**Angela Morrison**

*SUN Bucks Coordinator, Division of Child and Family Well-Being, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services*

# FOOD INSECURITY IS A CRITICAL CHALLENGE IN NORTH CAROLINA



1 in 4

North Carolina children face food insecurity or chronic hunger<sup>1</sup>



60%

of North Carolina children eligible for free or reduced-price meals at school<sup>1</sup>



12.8%

of North Carolina residents live below the poverty line<sup>2</sup>

## Causes of Food Insecurity During Summer

- Many students **lose access to school meals** during the summer months
- Lack of **access** to affordable supermarkets and grocery stores
- Dependency on **transportation** to summer meal sites

## Impact to Children

- Reliance on schools to provide meals, **limiting summer access to nutritious food** and impacting children's health
- **Adverse childhood development outcomes**, including heightened stress and worse academic performance<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

<sup>2</sup> Poverty Rate in NC (Statista)

<sup>3</sup> Food Insecurity and Child Development: A State-of-the-Art Review (NIH)

# PANDEMIC EBT (P-EBT) PROVIDED CRITICAL FOOD ASSISTANCE DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR, BUT THE TEMPORARY PROGRAM ENDED IN 2023



## Overview

North Carolina's P-EBT program was a federally funded temporary food assistance program designed to provide grocery-buying benefits to purchase nutritious foods for students and young children during COVID-19. The program began in 2020 but **ended in 2023**.

## Benefits

Like FNS EBT, benefits were provided on a pre-loaded card to buy food at authorized EBT retailers, including most grocery stores.

## Statewide Impact\*



**1.76 million**  
children served



**93% spend rate**,  
indicating a critical need  
for food assistance



**\$2.5 billion** issued in  
benefits

## INTRODUCTION TO SUN BUCKS

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NCDHHS, in partnership with NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), is expanding its food assistance efforts to become **one of the first states** to administer USDA's **new** summer nutrition program, "SUN Bucks."

### ***How much in SUN Bucks benefits will be issued?***

North Carolina will issue **\$120 in benefits** per eligible child, which can be used by families to purchase nutritious food.

### ***Who will be eligible for SUN Bucks?***

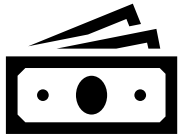
Students who participate in certain federal assistance programs will be eligible to **receive benefits automatically**, while other students **may apply** for SUN Bucks.



# SUN BUCKS WILL ADDRESS EXISTING ACCESSIBILITY GAPS IN FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

SUN Bucks will transform North Carolina's summer food assistance strategy into a **three-pronged approach** that emphasizes **accessibility**.

Currently, North Carolina operates two federally-assisted summer meal programs: the **Congregate (Group) Meal Service** and the new **Non-Congregate Meal Service (Meals To-Go)**. Accessibility challenges associated with these programs that **SUN Bucks will directly address** include:



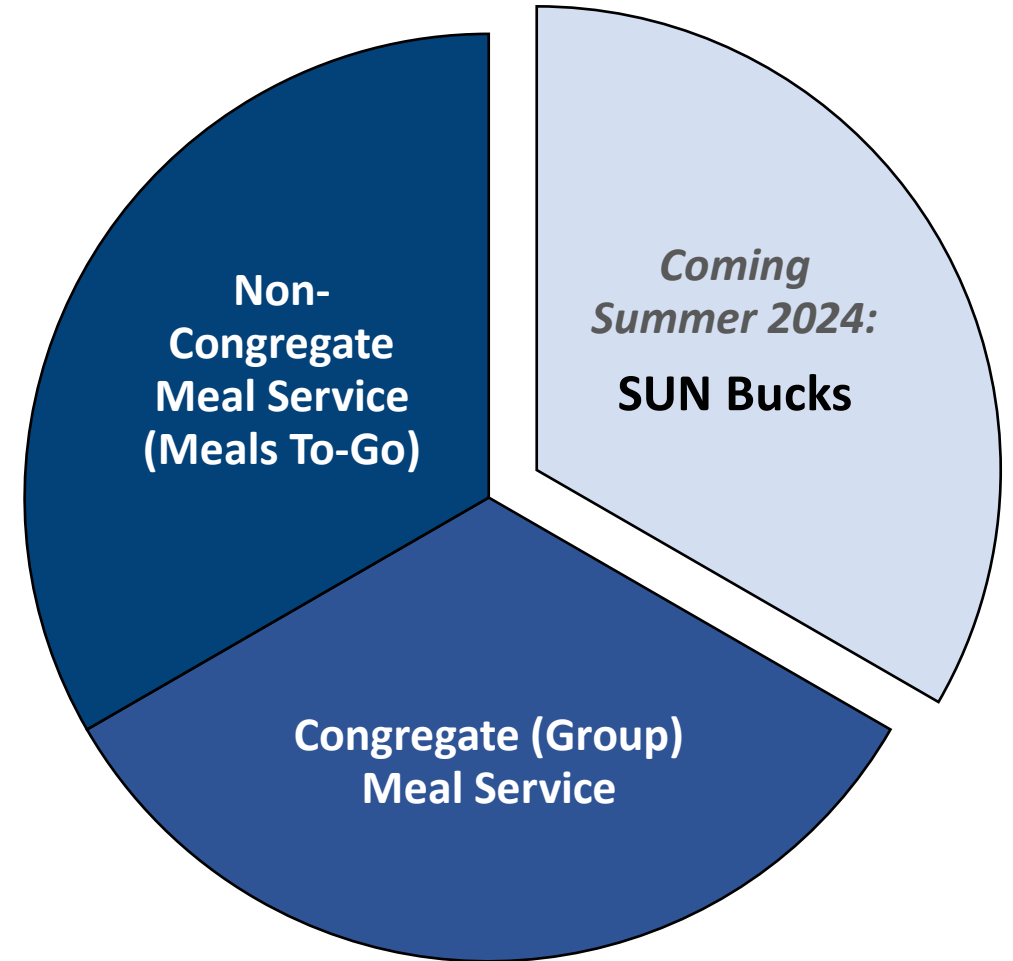
Children may live in areas that do not meet income requirements for summer nutrition meals.



Locating rural sponsors who can provide meals may be challenging due to transportation barriers.



89% of Group Meal Service sites require transportation to access, but only 30% of sites provide transportation.<sup>1</sup>



## SUN BUCKS 2024 PROGRAM GOAL AND IMPACT

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***NCDHHS and NCDPI aim to combat hunger among North Carolina's most food insecure children and teens.***

**1 million\***

NC children will receive benefits to increase access to healthy food choices during the summer months.

**\$120 million\***

in food assistance benefits during the 2024 summer months, feeding children while boosting NC's economy.

*\*All figures are approximate and rounded*



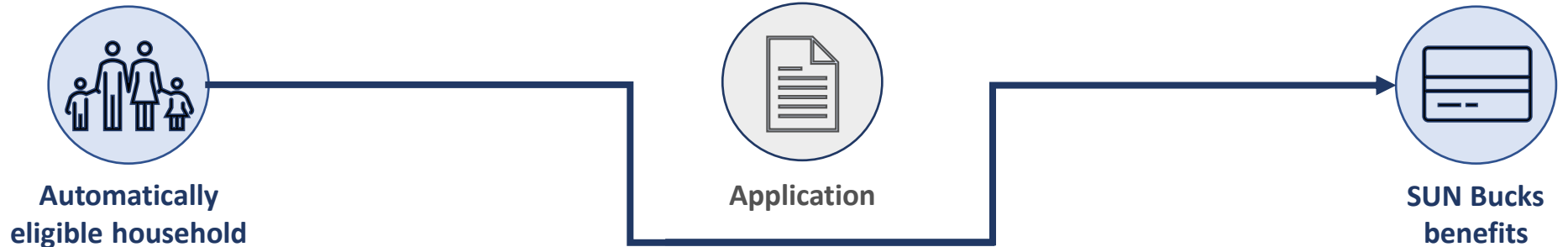
# SUN BUCKS AUTOMATIC ELIGIBILITY

**973k+**

**North Carolina  
students expected to  
be automatically  
eligible in 2024**

Students may be **automatically eligible** for SUN Bucks if they participate in at least one of the following programs and do **NOT** need to apply:

1. National School Lunch Program (NSLP) free or reduced-price (FRP) school meals
2. Food and Nutrition Services (FNS, food stamps)
3. Work First (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), cash assistance)
4. Medicaid with household income below 185% of the federal poverty level
5. Foster care



## How will families know if one or more of their children are automatically eligible?

Households with one or more children who are automatically eligible should receive an official Eligibility Notice via robocall, text, and email. More details are available on the [SUN Bucks webpage](https://ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks) (ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks).



# SCHOOL SEARCH TOOL

***A child's eligibility for SUN Bucks is partially impacted by the type of school they attend: National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), or neither.***

## What are NSLP and CEP?

**NSLP** is a federal program in most public schools and some charter and private nonprofit schools. As part of this program, kids who meet certain criteria can get free meals or meals at a lower price through their school.

**CEP** is part of NSLP and lets schools and education groups in certain places give meals to all students at no cost.

## How can I determine if a school is NSLP, CEP, or neither?

Visit [www.ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks-schoolsearch](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks-schoolsearch) to use the SUN Bucks 2024 School Search. You can use the search bar to determine if a school is NSLP, CEP, or neither by searching the school name, county, or zip code.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks-schoolsearch](http://ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks-schoolsearch). The page title is "SUN Bucks 2024 School Search". Below the title, there is a paragraph explaining that the list includes schools in North Carolina and shows if they participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), are a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school, or are neither. It instructs users to use the search bar to find their child's school by searching the school name, county, or zip code. Below this, there is a section for filtering results, showing "Show 100 entries" and a search bar. A table displays search results with columns for County, School Name, Zip Code, and Status. The first row shows "combe" for County, "A C Reynolds High" for School Name, "28803" for Zip Code, and "CEP" for Status.

County	School Name	Zip Code	Status
combe	A C Reynolds High	28803	CEP

## SUN BUCKS FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE: 4 THINGS TO KNOW

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1

New **SUN Bucks cards** will be mailed for all students identified as children in foster care to the local county DSS offices with custody of those children in foster care.

2

SUN Bucks cards will be **issued in the student's name**; multiple children will **not** be grouped together on a card.

3

Foster care social workers are responsible for delivering the following to children in foster care who get SUN Bucks: **Eligibility Notice** with the new **SUN Bucks card**, and then later the **Benefit Expiration Notice**.

4

The **student's foster care social worker** will provide the card and/or assist with transfer of the card to the student's current caretaker, whether that is a family foster home, congregate care setting, or return to biological family.

***IMPORTANT: It is imperative that the child's foster care social worker facilitates the transfer of the SUN Bucks card with the child if they change caregivers.***

# SUN BUCKS FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE: ELIGIBILITY NOTICE

***The 2024 SUN Bucks Eligibility Notice should be delivered either electronically or in print to the current caretaker of a student in foster care with their preloaded SUN Bucks card.***

## What is the Eligibility Notice?

As required by USDA, the SUN Bucks Eligibility Notice must be delivered (either electronically or printed) to all students who automatically qualify for SUN Bucks and do not need to apply. The Notice includes important information about how to activate a SUN Bucks card, what can be bought with these benefits, and where to go for more information.

## Where may I find the Eligibility Notice?

The Eligibility Notice will be shared electronically with DSS offices. Please deliver to the current caretaker of a student in foster care **with their preloaded SUN Bucks card** accordingly. Foster care social workers may either print and deliver the notice in-person or share it electronically.



Dear Parent / Guardian:

You are receiving this notice because **one or more children in your household have qualified for a new federal food assistance program called SUN Bucks**, which helps families buy groceries during the summer when school is out. The qualifying child(ren) will automatically be enrolled in the program, so **you do not need to apply**. Please note that each child is evaluated for eligibility individually, and not all children in your household may be eligible. Visit [www.ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks) for information on what qualifies a child for SUN Bucks.

You will receive a one-time \$120 benefit for each eligible child on a card that you can use to buy nutritious food at grocery stores, farmers markets, and other EBT-authorized retailers. If you receive more than \$120 per eligible child in your household, do not use the benefits, and contact the SUN Bucks call center at **1-866-719-0141** as soon as possible.

If you have an active Food and Nutrition Services (FNS, food stamps) case, your SUN Bucks benefits will be loaded on your existing card. If you **do not** have an active FNS case, you will be mailed a SUN Bucks card.

- *If you have Work First (TANF, cash assistance), Cherokee Tribal Food Distribution Program (CTFDP), or Medicaid:* Your card will be mailed to the address associated with those benefits.
- *If you do not get FNS, TANF, CTFDP, or Medicaid, but your child is approved to get Free or Reduced-Price meals at school:* Your card will be mailed to the address on file with your child's school.
- *If you are in foster care:* Your card will be mailed to your DSS office, and your caseworker will help get it to you.

**Note:** Not all CEP school children will be eligible, and some may need to apply. Visit [www.ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks) for information.

SUN Bucks benefits will begin to go out in June, but children will see their benefits throughout the summer once determined eligible. SUN Bucks **cards will be mailed as quickly as possible between June and August**. Children whose benefits are attached to active FNS cards will see their SUN Bucks benefits available in their FNS accounts within 10 days of issuance. Benefits expire 122 days after issuance, so make sure to use your benefits during the summer. Receiving SUN Bucks will not affect children or families' immigration status.

**How to Activate a New Card OR Order a New Card if you Have Lost or Destroyed Your SUN Bucks Card:**

The card works just like a debit card. Before using your card, you must first activate it and select a Personal Identification Number (PIN). There are three ways to activate your card, check your balance and replace your card:

1. Visit [www.ebtEDGE.com](http://www.ebtEDGE.com). Under "EBT Cardholder," click on "More Information." Login or Register here.
2. Download and use the ebtEDGE mobile app (can be downloaded on Google Play or Apple Store).
3. Call **1-888-622-7328** and follow the prompts.

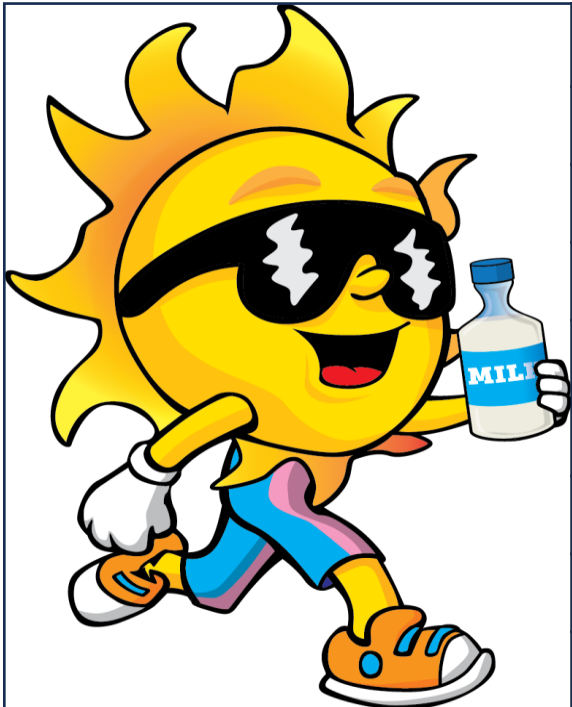
**IMPORTANT:** Your PIN activation code will be the date of birth (DOB) of a child in your household. **Try the DOB for each student in your household, starting with the youngest.** Enter the DOB using two digits for the month, two digits for the day, and four digits for the year. For example, if the date of birth is June 1, 2008, you would enter 06012008.

Examples of items you <b>CAN</b> buy with SUN Bucks	Examples of items you <b>CANNOT</b> buy with SUN Bucks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Breads, cereals, fruits, and vegetables</li><li>• Meats, fish, poultry, and dairy products</li><li>• Bottled water and non-alcoholic beverages.</li><li>• Seeds and plants that produce food</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes, or tobacco</li><li>• Any nonfood items, such as: pet foods, soaps, household supplies, vitamins, and medicine</li><li>• Hot or pre-prepared foods</li></ul>

Please note that selling benefits for cash is illegal and punishable by criminal prosecution. If you have questions, or would like to opt out of these benefits, please call **1-866-719-0141** and press Option 2. Please visit North Carolina's SUN Bucks website at [www.ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks) for SUN Bucks information, FAQs, and updates.

See here for the [USDA Non-Discrimination Statement](#). This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

## FOSTER CARE SCENARIO EXAMPLE #1



Student Name: Ray	
Age	8 years old
Type of school enrolled in	NSLP
FNS (Yes/No)	Yes
Medicaid (Yes/No)	No
Work First (Yes/No)	No
Foster Care (Yes/No)	Yes
If foster care, county with custody	Mecklenburg
Current county of residence	Mecklenburg

### Is Ray eligible for SUN Bucks this summer?

**YES!** Ray is automatically eligible for SUN Bucks because he is enrolled in an NSLP school and in foster care, which is one of the programs that makes a child automatically eligible. Ray does **not** need to apply for SUN Bucks in 2024.

### How will Ray receive his SUN Bucks benefits?

The SUN Bucks card for Ray will be mailed to the **Mecklenburg County DSS Office**. Once delivered, the foster care social worker managing Ray's foster care case will deliver his SUN Bucks card – along with the Eligibility Notice – to Ray's current caretaker. If Ray changes caregivers, the social worker must make sure the SUN Bucks card follows Ray to his new placement. Note, even though Ray participates in FNS, his benefits will be loaded onto a **new** SUN Bucks card.

## FOSTER CARE SCENARIO EXAMPLE #2



Student Name: Rayette	
Age	15 years old
Type of school enrolled in	CEP
FNS (Yes/No)	No
Medicaid (Yes/No)	Yes
Work First (Yes/No)	Yes
Foster Care (Yes/No)	Yes
If foster care, county with custody	Wake
Current county of residence	Catawba

### Is Rayette eligible for SUN Bucks this summer?

**YES!** Rayette is automatically eligible for SUN Bucks because she is enrolled in a CEP school and in foster care, which is one of the programs that makes a child automatically eligible. Rayette does **not** need to apply for SUN Bucks in 2024.

### How will Rayette receive her SUN Bucks benefits?

The SUN Bucks card for Rayette will be mailed to the **Wake County DSS Office**. Once delivered, the foster care social worker managing Rayette's foster care case should work with **Catawba County** to deliver her SUN Bucks card – along with the Eligibility Notice – to Rayette's current caretaker. If Rayette changes caregivers, the social worker must make sure the SUN Bucks card follows Rayette to her new placement.

## FOSTER CARE SCENARIO EXAMPLE #3



Student Names: Rainbow and Ryan (Twins)	
Age	11 years old
Type of school enrolled in	Non-NSLP
FNS (Yes/No)	No
Medicaid (Yes/No)	Yes
Work First (Yes/No)	No
Foster Care (Yes/No)	Yes
If foster care, county with custody	Alamance
Current county of residence	Alamance

### Are Rainbow and Ryan eligible for SUN Bucks this summer?

**YES!** Both Rainbow and Ryan are automatically eligible for SUN Bucks. While not enrolled in a NSLP or CEP school, they're between the ages of 7-16 years and in foster care, which is one of the programs that makes a child automatically eligible. They do **not** need to apply.

### How will Rainbow and Ryan receive their SUN Bucks benefits?

**Two, separate** SUN Bucks cards – one for Rainbow and one for Ryan – will be mailed to the **Alamance County DSS Office**. Once delivered, the foster care social worker(s) managing Rainbow and Ryan's foster care cases will deliver the SUN Bucks cards – along with the Eligibility Notices – to the current caretaker(s) for Rainbow and Ray. If either child changes caregivers, the social worker must make sure the SUN Bucks card follows that child to their new placement.

## SUN BUCKS FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE: EXPIRATION NOTICE

*The 2024 SUN Bucks Expiration Notice should be delivered to the current caretaker of a student in foster care no less than 30-days ahead of their benefits expiration date.*

### What is the Expiration Notice?

As required by USDA, the SUN Bucks Expiration Notice must be delivered (either electronically or via print) to all students who received SUN Bucks **no less than 30 days ahead of their benefits expiring.** The Notice includes important information about managing a SUN Bucks account and where to go for more information.

### How do I know when to deliver the Expiration Notice?

Counties will receive lists of students in foster care who have received SUN Bucks and their expiration dates. Based on this report, it is the responsibility of the county and foster care social worker to deliver the Expiration Notice to the current caretaker of a student in foster care at least 30-days before the student's benefits expire. **The Expiration Notice will be shared with DSS offices electronically.**

SUN Bucks benefits expire **122 days** after the benefits are available, **not** the date that the card was activated.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*Stay up to date on SUN Bucks information and NCDHHS food assistance programs. Please help spread the word and direct constituents to the SUN Bucks website, which will be regularly updated.*

### Where can I go for more information about SUN Bucks?

- **NCDHHS Website:** [www.ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks)
- **NCDHHS Social Media (Instagram, Facebook, and X):** @NCDHHS
- **Carolina Hunger Initiative Website:** [www.carolinahungerinitiative.org](http://www.carolinahungerinitiative.org)
- **SUN Bucks Call Center:** 1-866-719-0141, press option 2

*Please reach out to [DCFWSUNBucks@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:DCFWSUNBucks@dhhs.nc.gov) with any questions!*



#### Handouts

- 1) SUN Bucks Informational Flyer (English, Spanish)
- 2) SUN Bucks Overview Flyer (English, Spanish)
- 3) [SUN Bucks Resources for County Staff](http://ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks) on [ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks](http://ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks)





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**1.mail:**

Food and Nutrition Service, USDA  
1320 Braddock Place, Room 334  
Alexandria, VA 22314; or

**2.fax:**

(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

**3.email:**

[FNSCIVILRIGHTSCOMPLAINTS@usda.gov](mailto:FNSCIVILRIGHTSCOMPLAINTS@usda.gov)

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