



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

February 8, 2024

THE HONORABLE BILL LEE
Governor of Tennessee
State Capitol
600 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Blvd
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee:

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) serves as our Nation's foundational safety net for low-income families, older adults, and individuals with disabilities to obtain the nutrition they need. SNAP plays a critical role in reducing hunger, improving health, and helping children succeed in school and in life. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and States together share the responsibility to make sure that households have access to timely and accurate SNAP benefits.

I urge you to prioritize these concerns and take appropriate steps to make sure that your State has an acceptable application processing timeliness (APT) rate, payment error rate (PER), and case and procedural error rate (CAPER) and meets basic Federal requirements. The most recent State-reported data show Tennessee had an APT rate of 79.18 percent (acceptable performance is above 95 percent), an overpayment error rate of 19.04 percent and an underpayment rate of 0.75 percent in Fiscal Year 2022 (acceptable performance is below 6 percent when the two are added together), and a Fiscal Year 2022 CAPER of 29.60 percent (national average is 44.12 percent). Further, according to the most recent State-reported data, your performance in CAPER is worse. Fortunately, according to the most recent State-reported data, your performance in PER is starting to show improvement.

Timely and accurate SNAP processing is critical to meeting the nutrition needs of low-income families and protecting the integrity of SNAP. Americans in need should have access to essential benefits without unnecessary delays. People should not lose access to food because States are unable to review their applications in a timely fashion. States must deliver benefits in the right amounts, to the right individuals, and in the required periods of time. Both timeliness and program integrity are critical to maintain public confidence in States' management of SNAP and to maximize the impact of Federal investment in addressing food insecurity. USDA takes its oversight and monitoring role of State performance seriously and has been proactively engaging with States on these issues.

USDA is ready to work with you to ensure that those in need of nutrition assistance receive timely and accurate benefits. States should consider all options available under current law — such as assigning the longest certification periods allowed for the household or streamlining verification — to reduce burden on clients and to increase staff time available for reducing backlogs and focusing on accurate and timely case processing. States can also make investments in systems and staffing to improve efficiency, provide excellent customer service, and meet

THE HONORABLE BILL LEE

Page 2

Federal standards. USDA stands ready to provide technical assistance on policy and operational options available to your State, best practices from other States, and other support.

We share your desire to build strong service delivery systems that meet the needs of low-income people, and we look forward to continuing our work together to strengthen the nutrition security of American families.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your USDA Food and Nutrition Service Regional Administrator, Willie Taylor, at 404-227-4164.

Sincerely,

THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary