



Food and
Nutrition
Service

Park Office
Center

3101 Park
Center Drive
Alexandria
VA 22302

October 6, 2017

SUBJECT: SNAP – Issues with Certification Materials Submission Instructions

TO: All Regional Directors
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Recently it has come to our attention that Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applicants and households are sending certification materials to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) instead of the appropriate SNAP State agency for processing. USDA is concerned about the customer-service and processing impact this has on clients and States. USDA is asking SNAP State agencies to review the clarity of their certification material submission instructions to identify areas where they can be made more user-friendly.

SNAP State agencies are given flexibility in how they operate SNAP, including how certification materials such as applications, notices, and verification requests are designed, in order to best serve households in their States. USDA believes that the placement of the Nondiscrimination Statement (NDS) on SNAP certification materials, which includes the address of USDA Office of Civil Rights may contribute to why applicants and households are sending us their certification materials. Since many States have placed the NDS at the end of certification materials, the last address, and sometimes the only address, an applicant or household sees is that of USDA's Office of Civil Rights, rather than that of the SNAP State agency.

USDA asks each SNAP State agency to review its certification materials to ensure they are customer-friendly. Clear and accessible instructions will encourage applicants and households to submit their materials to the correct location, resulting in a more efficient and effective certification process overall. Below are some best practices State agencies should consider:

- Describe multiple ways to submit certification materials: mailing address, online, in-person, telephone;
- Provide submission instructions in multiple locations including after the last question/signature box on certification materials;
- Use visual cues to mark the submission instructions prominently on the application (e.g. use of bold/colored font, icons, shaded boxes or bullets, and appropriate spacing);
- Include a pre-addressed envelope;
- Avoid using URLs as the only way to access a county/local office mailing address;
- Include an attachment with county/local office mailing addresses; or
- Review certification materials with applicants and clients to gather feedback for improvements.

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USDA will continue to monitor the volume of certification materials received to see if more aggressive steps are needed. We share your priority to improve customer service and ensure our programs are administered efficiently, effectively and with the utmost integrity.

Please distribute this guidance to your State agencies and advise them to contact their respective FNS Regional Offices (RO) points of contact with any questions and for technical assistance. ROs should contact Michael Ribar at (703) 305-2449 with any questions concerning this memorandum.



/S/

Lizbeth Silberman
Director
Program Development Division

Ronald Ward
Director
Program Accountability and