



June 1, 2016

Dear SNAP Commissioners:

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) currently serves 44 million people, providing nutrition benefits that help low-income families make healthy food choices. One of this Administration's priorities over the last several years has been to connect SNAP participants with job-driven employment and training opportunities so that participants can gain necessary skills, join the workforce, and ultimately move forward into self-sufficiency.

Connecting SNAP recipients who wish to pursue a postsecondary credential linked to employment with available financial aid may open a critical door to opportunity for them and their families to gain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the workforce and achieve self-sufficiency. Financial aid has been proven to increase college access and completion. That is why the Administration has increased the maximum Pell Grant by over \$1,000 since President Barack Obama took office and tied it to inflation; created the American Opportunity Tax Credit to offer students and families up to \$10,000 over 4 years of college to cover tuition and academic supplies; made student debt more manageable by allowing millions more borrowers to cap their loan payments at 10 percent of their income through income-driven repayment plans; and worked with Congress to keep student loan interest rates low. Altogether, the Department of Education provides access to over \$150 billion in Federal student aid to more than 11 million students each year; States and postsecondary institutions also provide billions of dollars of additional financial aid resources.

To access Federal and most other financial aid, students must first complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). SNAP recipients seeking to improve their skills and obtain a postsecondary credential linked to employment are likely eligible for Federal student aid. In particular, SNAP recipients enrolled in programs eligible for Federal student aid typically qualify for the maximum Pell grant, which is \$5,815 for the current academic year. In some instances, SNAP participants attending an institution of higher education more than half-time may be ineligible for SNAP, unless they meet certain exemptions.

SNAP recipients who already have Federal student loans could also qualify to make affordable monthly payments, capped at 10 percent of their income, through an income-driven repayment plan, which could be as low as zero. You can help notify SNAP participants of these important resources, starting with the attached flyer about the FAFSA.

The enclosed flyer, along with additional information about the FAFSA, has been posted on the Financial Aid Toolkit (<http://www.financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov>) for download. You may wish to share this flyer directly with SNAP recipients in routine mailings to SNAP participants, and at

your local office's front reception desk. Consider including this flyer and other FAFSA information from the Financial Aid Toolkit on your Web site for recipients to access.

Research shows that sending students timely and relevant information (through an e-mail, letter, or text) about financial aid can be effective in increasing FAFSA submission—and, as a result, in improving college enrollment and completion. Providing early awareness to students and families that college can be affordable can help reorient their expectations and prepare them both academically and financially for higher education. Completing the FAFSA may mean the difference between going to, and completing, college or not.

Thank you for your partnership and for sharing information about opportunities available to support education and skills-building with SNAP participants.

Sincerely,

/S/

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture

/S/

John B. King, Jr.
Secretary of Education

Enclosure