



Michelle Lujan Grisham, Governor
David R. Scrase, M.D., Secretary
Karmela Martinez, ISD Director

September 23, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

This letter will serve as the New Mexico Human Services Department's (NMHSD) formal comments in opposition to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposal to essentially eliminate Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Should this rule take effect as proposed, approximately 12,261 New Mexican's would lose access to basic food assistance. Many of those impacted would be among the most vulnerable in our state, including individuals with disabilities, single parents, the elderly and children.

USDA's proposal will jeopardize access to free and reduced-price meals at school for an estimated 500,000 low-income children nation-wide. Children suffer in school when they are not properly fed, the proposed rule would eliminate the automatic enrollment for kids in SNAP families and in the free and reduced-price lunch and breakfast programs. If this proposed rule becomes final 5,607 children age 17 and younger will be adversely affected in New Mexico.

New Mexico utilizes BBCE to adopt less restrictive income and asset tests and to better coordinate SNAP with other state-operated programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The result has been an increase in low-income households getting access to the food assistance they need, while also making SNAP easier and less costly for the state to administer.

USDA's proposal incorrectly assumes that states approve households for SNAP utilizing BBCE without verifying incomes or thoroughly assessing the need for benefits. To qualify for SNAP benefits, all households, including those eligible under BBCE, are subject to an interview and must provide thorough documentation to demonstrate they meet the eligibility requirements for SNAP based on the household's circumstances. This verification includes reviewing the household's income and expenses. There is no evidence to support the proposal's claim that BBCE compromises SNAP's integrity or leads to an increase in assistance being directed to ineligible households.

As proposed this rule essentially eliminates BBCE, causing higher administrative costs for New Mexico and reduced access to essential food aid for needy families. The timeliness of application processing would be dependent upon constituents providing additional documentation. Additionally,

the NMHSD would expend additional funding and resources on rule promulgation and substantial enhancements to the existing eligibility system to implement the proposed changes.

NMHSD provides benefits for over 1 million New Mexicans, we strongly urge you to rescind the proposed rule to preserve the flexibility needed to meet the food and nutrition needs of the low-income populations in our state. New Mexico should be partnering with the federal government to protect and support the most vulnerable among us and ensure that all children have food on their plates while ensuring all families are able to transition out of poverty. BBCE has proven effective at moving us closer to achieving these goals and should, therefore, be protected and not restricted.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A Prof for Karmela Martinez". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Karmela Martinez, Director
Income Support Division