



Minnesota Department of Human Services  
Elmer L. Andersen Building  
Commissioner Emily Piper  
Post Office Box 64998  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55164-0998

January 4, 2018

Mr. Brandon Lipps  
Acting Deputy Under Secretary  
Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Lipps:

Thank you for your November 30, 2017 letter and your thoughts on the administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). I appreciate your commitment to open communication and partnership and look forward to engaging with you over the next year, particularly since Congress will be working to reauthorize the Farm Bill.

Hunger and poverty are what drive participation in SNAP. In Minnesota, more than 645,000 people participated in SNAP in federal fiscal year (FY) 2016 to meet their nutritional needs, 55 percent of whom live in Greater Minnesota. Seventy percent of Minnesotans that access SNAP are children, seniors, and people with disabilities. The average SNAP benefit per person, per meal is \$1.17 and families receiving SNAP often run out of food before the end of the month and resort to food shelves as a last option.

Your letter states that your focus will be in three key areas: (1) self-sufficiency, (2) integrity, and (3) customer service. Here in Minnesota, my focus is to ensure that eligible families receive the food assistance they need to lead healthy, productive lives with a stellar level of program integrity and customer service. We have shown in our state that we can meet that goal while ensuring strict accountability for taxpayer dollars.

In your letter, you assert that, "The American dream has never been to live on government benefits" and that "People who can work, should work." In our state, many SNAP recipients *are* working. In fact, 67% of SNAP households with children are working. The problem is, the income they earn is not enough to feed their families. Working adults who qualify for SNAP are employed in low-wage jobs, often with inconsistent hours and few benefits. Working adults and unemployed adults with recent work history on SNAP are concentrated in the hotel/restaurant industry, temporary agencies, and retail and health care sectors according to an analysis our department completed in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. Low wage workers are twice as likely to end up unemployed as higher paid workers and even though the unemployment rate in our state is currently

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low, hard work isn't paying off for many Minnesotans. SNAP is a critical safety net for working families living in poverty.

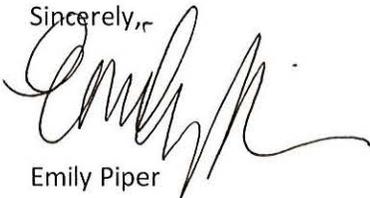
I share your focus on strong program integrity. Fraud, while not pervasive, is taken seriously. Strong program oversight over benefit issuance and usage with Quality Control systems and other mechanisms ensure accuracy and accountability. Recently, Minnesota has been one of a handful of states found to not have bias in its Quality Control system and was awarded a bonus for our high level of program integrity. We work hard to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used responsibly.

A high level of customer service is also a top priority for our Department. It is crucial that eligible Minnesotans receive the nutrition assistance they need without being treated badly when they seek help. For this reason, I appreciate that SNAP allows states choices and options to experiment with more efficient and effective ways to deliver services. Minnesota takes advantage of these options in a number of ways. With our state-supervised, county-administered program, flexibility is built in to the structure and allows county agencies to improve efficiency and service. Many have implemented a variety of case management models to get benefits to families and individuals on a timely basis. For example, they are using technology solutions for streamlining including document imaging systems (which increases the timeliness of application processing and eligibility determination and helps avoid lost client documents) and sophisticated phone software to modernize SNAP operations. Furthermore, allowing states to waive the asset test also improves customer service and has helped our state reach more seniors who qualify for SNAP.

As we head into 2018 with Congress considering a reauthorization of the Farm Bill, our state has strong representation in Congress with three Minnesota members on the House Committee on Agriculture (including Ranking Member Collin Peterson) and our senior Senator Amy Klobuchar is on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. I am in consistent communication with our delegation and will be engaged over the next year as Farm Bill proposals emerge. Our Department has developed a website so that Minnesotans can easily find information about hunger in Minnesota and how SNAP serves our state (see: <https://mn.gov/dhs/farm-bill/>) and Governor Dayton recently sent a letter to our delegation outlining his priorities for the Farm Bill (see: [http://mn.gov/gov-stat/pdf/2017\\_12\\_19\\_Governor%20Dayton\\_Farm\\_Bill\\_Letter.pdf](http://mn.gov/gov-stat/pdf/2017_12_19_Governor%20Dayton_Farm_Bill_Letter.pdf)).

In Minnesota, we pride ourselves on maintaining a strong safety net and effective social service delivery. I look forward to working with you to ensure we continue our efficient and effective SNAP program so that Minnesotans with low incomes receive the food assistance they need and that food insecurity in our state becomes less and less prevalent into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Piper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Emily Piper  
Commissioner