

September 9, 2013

Dear Chief State School Officers and State Auditors:

The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs play a critical role in ensuring that America's children have access to the nutritious food they need to learn and succeed in the classroom. And while Americans overwhelmingly support efforts to help children achieve these goals, taxpayers deserve to know that their investment in healthy school meals is being managed wisely. In that spirit, we should all be concerned by recent incidents in parts of the United States where school district employees allegedly misrepresented their incomes in order to illegally receive free or reduced price school meals for their children.

To assist State and local school officials with addressing this problem, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued guidance on ways to review and confirm the information provided on applications in order to ensure the accuracy of the income information provided by school district employees. We would like to take this opportunity to brief you on this policy and to assure you that the USDA shares your interest in properly targeting free and reduced price meal benefits to eligible children.

In the school meals programs, all applications are certified based on the information submitted on the application. While the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act provides a framework for verifying the information contained in a small sample of household applications for free and reduced price meals, there is also a requirement that local educational agencies (LEAs) verify any questionable application on a case-by-case basis. This policy is considered "verification for cause." A household submitting a questionable application is immediately notified that they must submit proof of the information they provided.

LEAs can also review approved applications for free or reduced price meals when known or available information indicates applicants may have misrepresented their incomes on applications to receive free or reduced price meals for their children. Our guidance clarifies how the LEA may use the salary information of their employees, maintained for business purposes, to identify questionable applications and take appropriate action.

USDA supports and appreciates the efforts of State and local school officials to protect the integrity of the child nutrition programs. USDA believes that judicious use of the verification for cause policy is critical both to maintaining access to free or reduced price school meals for eligible children as well as addressing concerns of possible employee misrepresentation in order to inappropriately obtain benefits for their children.

Enclosed is our most recent memorandum on verification for cause, which is also available on our website: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/Policy-Memos/2012/SP13-2012os.pdf>. Thank you for your assistance in sharing this policy with the LEAs in your state. We know you share our concerns about ensuring that school children have access to healthful meals during the school day and that maintaining the overall integrity of our programs assists with that effort. A similar letter has been sent to your State Auditor's office.

Sincerely,



Kevin W. Concannon
Under Secretary