



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

November 2, 2018

The Honorable
Governor
State of

Dear Governor:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) believes in moving recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to self-sufficiency through the dignity of work. Through work, SNAP recipients, especially those who are Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), are lifted up and out of poverty and dependence: we should be working together to make that happen. As a former Governor, I recognize the challenges, but believe that with the help and technical assistance of USDA, we can “do right and feed everyone.”

The law generally requires ABAWDs between the ages of 18 and 49 to work and/or participate in a work program for at least 80 hours per month or do workfare, to receive SNAP for longer than 3 months in any 3-year period. In fiscal year 2016, there were approximately 3.8 million ABAWDs receiving SNAP, including 1.7 million who lived in States or areas that had waivers of the ABAWD requirements and were thus excused from the time limit. It is time to rethink the use of waivers and support movement to self-sufficiency for these individuals.

As the national unemployment rate continues to decrease, the number of ABAWD waivers in areas with low unemployment should also decrease. However, 36 States still currently waive the ABAWD requirements for all or some of the ABAWD population. These waivers weaken States’ ability to move the ABAWD population to long-term self-sufficiency because they do not require ABAWDs to engage in work and work training.

Moving ABAWDs to work is common-sense policy. I strongly advise all States with ABAWD waivers to review your policy choices concerning when and where to request these waivers. As a part of our mutual commitment to move SNAP recipients to self-sufficiency, I ask you also to evaluate if your State is effectively engaging the ABAWD population in work and Federal, State, or local work training programs, including the SNAP Employment and Training program. USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service Regional Offices are available to provide technical assistance to help your State achieve the goals of self-sufficiency and engagement in work activities for ABAWDs.

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In February, USDA called for a public comment regarding SNAP requirements and services for ABAWDs via an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. USDA received approximately 5,400 unique comments in response and is taking those comments into consideration as we prepare a forthcoming proposed rule. When USDA publishes this proposed rule, I encourage your State to submit comments. As we progress toward rulemaking, now is a good time to ensure your State systems are up-to-date to track ABAWDS.

USDA stands ready to work with you on these issues because the American dream has never been to live on Government benefits: those who can work should work. Together, we can “do right and feed everyone.”

Sincerely,



Sonny Perdue
Secretary