

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 7, 2009

The Honorable Tom J. Vilsack  
Secretary Of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As you know, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides an important safety net for needy individuals and families, including hundreds of thousands of our constituents. Since 2005, our delegation has expressed our concerns to your predecessor about how Texas mishandles the Food Stamp Program. Today, we write to express our grave concern over reports that Texas is failing to meet the requirements of the Food Stamp Act, related to the timely processing of SNAP applications. Needless processing delays are hurting our most vulnerable constituents, draining the resources of our local food banks, and slowing Texas' economic recovery. These delays are the product of indifference and the State's costly, failed experiment with privatization.

The State's failure to meet federal SNAP timeliness standards cannot be attributed to the economic downturn or increasing requests for food assistance. The State has failed to meet application processing standards for almost four years. In September 2009, only 58.6 percent of SNAP applications were processed timely, delaying benefits to over 43,000 Texas families. The *Austin-American Statesman* recently reported that in many of the local SNAP offices in our districts, families routinely wait anywhere from 89 to 150 days for an interview.

We are aware of the advance warning letter that USDA's Southwest Regional Administrator, William Ludwig, sent the State last month. We thank you for your intervention on behalf of our neediest constituents. We also support your recommendations for reducing the workload of SNAP eligibility staff and improving program access. But much more must be done to bring the State into compliance with federal law. Notably, Mr. Ludwig's letter fails to acknowledge the shortage of trained eligibility workers, which is the most important problem facing SNAP in Texas. It is our understanding that the State employs 1,000 fewer eligibility workers than it did a decade ago, but they are serving twice the number of SNAP recipients.

We respectfully request additional, immediate action by USDA to improve Texas SNAP performance. Without the strongest possible enforcement from the federal government, we are concerned that the State will not take the necessary steps to improve SNAP administration. In fact, despite the warning letter from your regional office, Governor Rick Perry and Texas' Legislative Budget Board recently refused to approve the Health and Human Service Commission's request for 649 additional staff, approving only 250 new workers.

In these tough economic times, SNAP plays a vital role in increasing food security and ensuring that needy Americans can afford a nutritious diet. We respectfully ask that you inform us of the actions USDA takes. We would appreciate you promptly providing us with a timeline for additional actions to enforce the Food Stamp Act in Texas and to correct these serious deficiencies in SNAP administration.

Sincerely,

Hayden

John D. D.

Eddie Bernice Johnson

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Shirley Jackson Lee

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