

2413 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0703
(202) 225-3661

59 ELM STREET
SECOND FLOOR
NEW HAVEN, CT 06510
(203) 562-3718

DURHAM/MIDDLEFIELD/MIDDLETOWN
(860) 344-1159

WEBSITE: [HTTP://DELAURO.HOUSE.GOV](http://DELAURO.HOUSE.GOV)



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AND RELATED AGENCIES

April 4, 2018

Brandon Lipps
Administrator
Food and Nutrition Service
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Administrator Lipps:

I write today to express my deep concern regarding the direction that the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has taken under your leadership. Over the past nine months, I have watched the increase of misguided and irresponsible rhetoric coming from your office, which I fear has only served to undermine federal nutrition programs and stigmatize program recipients.

Federal nutrition programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) serve as an anti-hunger lifeline for millions of our country's most vulnerable. According to the most recent data compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS)¹, the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program each serve an average of 14.7 million and 30.0 million children, respectively, each day of school. Another program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), provides nutrient-rich foods, on average, to 7.3 million mothers and their children per month. Last year, our nation's largest nutrition safety net, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), prevented 42.2 million people from going hungry, including nearly 20 million children, 4.8 million low-income seniors, and 1.5 million low-income military veterans.²

Despite their broad reach, it is widely recognized that federal nutrition programs have the lowest instances of fraud compared to all government programs. Specifically with respect to the food stamp program, CRS has found that "SNAP fraud is rare, according to all available data and reports."³ Furthermore, the House Committee on Agriculture has held 23 committee hearings on SNAP – none of which revealed structural problems with the program. Let us not forget that it

¹ U.S. Congressional Research Service. Domestic Food Assistance: Summary of Programs. (R42353, March 22, 2018), by Kirsten J. Colello and Randy Alison Aussenberg.

² Based on demographic data compiled by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

³ U.S. Congressional Research Service. Errors and Fraud in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). (R45147, March 30, 2018), by Daniel R. Cline and Randy Alison Aussenberg.

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has not even been a full year since Secretary Sonny Perdue, referring to SNAP, said “You don’t try to fix something that isn’t broken.”

With this in mind, last week’s announcement that USDA will expand its focus on “program integrity” across all nutrition programs is unfortunate. I am requesting a meeting to discuss this new approach, as well as other concerns I have related to the Agency’s recent actions.

Additionally, I seek written responses to the following questions no later than April 30, 2018.

- 1.) What has prompted the Department to expand its focus on “program integrity?” Has this decision been made based on new data and/or research findings? If so, what are those new findings?
- 2.) With respect to the new position of Chief Integrity Officer, will this position be filled by a political appointment or a career employee? Either way, what specific qualifications will the Agency look for when filling this position? What is the Agency’s timeline regarding the hiring of the position?
- 3.) With respect to the third-party review initiated by the Agency, what has prompted this study? Who is conducting the study? How did the Agency select the third-party? What is the estimated cost of this project? What is the project’s detailed Scope of Work? What is the expected timeline of the study? The press release states that the study will “explore the implementation of promising practices across government and the private sector” – what are those “practices?” Upon completion, will the Agency commit to publically releasing the study?

Programs like SNAP have enjoyed bipartisan support for decades because our leaders have recognized our moral obligation to standup for the vulnerable in the United States. Hunger does not just affect the poorest in our communities; it affects the lives of working families, children, low-wage workers, the unemployed, and seniors.

Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Christian Lovell of my staff at (202) 225-3661. I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress