



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Social Services

325 North Salisbury Street
2401 Mail Service Center • Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2401
Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

Pheon E. Beal, Director
(919) 733-3055

October 26, 2004

Dear County Director of Social Services:

SUBJECT: Food Stamp Program Access

In a recent meeting with Secretary Carmen Hooker Odom and Donald Arnette, the Regional Administrator for Food and Nutrition Services of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, North Carolina's Food Stamp Program was cited for doing very well in the areas of payment accuracy (96.17 percent through May 2004—highest in the southeast), timeliness in processing applications (95.20 percent—third highest in southeast), and negative error rates—inappropriate denials (3.36 percent—fourth lowest in the southeast). In comparison, North Carolina's efforts in reaching potentially eligible households (52.3 percent) was found to be the second lowest in the southeast and among the lowest in the nation.

We shared with Secretary Odom and Mr. Arnette that as a result of the economic downturn in North Carolina, the number of households participating in the Food Stamp Program has increased by approximately 40 percent since July 2000. We also noted that this caseload growth is continuing to tax staffing resources in most counties as you work to serve those individuals and families. As a result, our ability to conduct wholesale efforts to reach the unserved population has been somewhat constrained by most counties' inability to add staff to accommodate the new households. We did, however, commit to working with you to develop strategies that will enable us to identify and offer services to those that are believed to be income eligible, but who are not participating in the Food Stamp Program.

We hope this letter will serve as the beginning of our collaboration with you on effective information and outreach strategies to expand program participation to income eligible households. A separate letter is being prepared that will provide each county with an individual county participation report so as to better understand how your county is performing as compared to the State's average.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wilbert R. Morris".

Wilbert R. Morris
Associate Director

cc: Pheon Beal
Sherry Bradsher
Jane Schwartz
Terry Carlin
Food Assistance & Energy Representatives

DIR-3-2004