



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Social Services

ROY COOPER • Governor
MANDY COHEN, MD, MPH • Secretary
MICHAEL BECKETTS • Assistant Secretary for Human Services

January 11, 2019

Dear County Directors of Social Services

Attention: Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Administrators, Managers and Supervisors
Program Integrity Supervisors and Investigators

Subject: February FNS Benefits to Be Issued Early as Federal Shutdown Continues

Priority: **Action Required**

On December 21, 2018 the federal government began a partial federal shutdown that impacts operations for several of our federal partnering agencies. This communication provides guidance to county departments of social services about the impact on the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Program.

Overview:

As a result of the federal shutdown, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans to issue February 2019 FNS benefits early. Funds will be loaded onto the electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards and will be available to the family to use no later than January 20, 2019. In order to ensure that families have their benefits loaded onto their EBT cards, DHHS will be required to transfer beneficiary information to the EBT vendor by 5 PM January 15, 2019.

Extended Recertification Period

For FNS cases with January 2019 as the last month of their certification period, NCFASST will automatically extend the certification period to February 28, 2019. The county **will not** have to perform any action to extend the certification period. This extension includes all cases regardless if the recertification has been processed. The **county is still required** to process the recertification following normal procedures.

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES • ECONOMIC AND FAMILY SERVICES

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New Application Process

- Counties should prioritize processing any expedited applications first, followed by non-expedited applications before processing recertifications by January 15, 2018.
- USDA had indicated that January FNS applications **that qualify for expedited benefits**, and are processed between January 21st and January 30th, will be issued combined January and February benefits. DHHS is waiting further guidance from the USDA related to the impact of the shutdown non-expedited applications that are processed between January 21st and January 30th.

Error Cases and Timeliness

Once recertifications are completed and if cases are determined to be ineligible, the county office should take no action at this time. DHHS is waiting for further guidance from USDA.

Messaging

The Department will be issuing a press release to media outlets across North Carolina to ensure that households will be informed that the benefits are not additional or bonus benefits but are for February 2019 and no additional benefits will be issued until federal funding is authorized.

Additionally, DHHS will use social media and our website to provide information. We are partnering with the NC Retail Merchants Association and 211 to get the word out to the community.

As always households may access their account information through the free mobile application called *ebtEDGE* or by calling the number on the back of the EBT card.

Administrative Cost

USDA has made provisions for states to draw down administrative cost for January and February 2019. Counties should submit the DSS-1571 following the normal reimbursement process.

Once the USDA provides final guidance to states on FNS, we will schedule an all-county call to provide an update.

Sincerely,



David Locklear

EFS-FNSEP-02-2019