



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

NOV 23 2010

DEC 13 2010

The Honorable Bob Jauch
Chair
Joint Legislative Council
State of Wisconsin
Post Office Box 2536
One East Main Street, Suite 401
Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Mr. Jauch:

Thank you for your letter of October 21, 2010, cosigned by your colleagues concerning the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the feasibility of releasing information on SNAP households to child protective services (CPS) when those households do not use their benefits for an extended period of time. The purpose of release of this information would be to alert CPS that there may be potential for child abuse in those households.

The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 limits the release and use of information provided by SNAP applicants to purposes directly related to the administration and enforcement of SNAP or to apprehend fleeing felons. Therefore, State agencies administering SNAP may not provide information to CPS strictly on the basis of non use of program benefits.

In 2006, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) released the results of a study on SNAP benefit redemption patterns in 2003. You may find the study on line at:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/SNAP/FILES/ProgramOperations/EBTRedemption.pdf>
This study found that very few households make no food purchases from their Electronic Benefits Transfer account. Only 7 percent of all households nationally (9.6 percent in Wisconsin) had any months of inactivity. For most of these households, inactivity was limited to just a single month. Less than 1 percent of all households had consecutive months of inactivity, and inactivity was more likely among households with small benefits. FNS staff is currently in the process of analyzing the SNAP benefit redemption data for fiscal year 2009 and expect to release the report in early 2011.

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I appreciate your raising this situation to my attention. As we review the results of our latest study, we will keep your concern in mind. I applaud the efforts of the Joint Legislative Council in promoting and protecting the well being of Wisconsin's children. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



Kevin W. Concannon
Under Secretary
Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services