

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 28, 2010

Jennifer Velez, Esq.
Commissioner
Department of Human Services
222 South Warren Street, PO Box 700
Trenton, NJ 08625-0700

Dear Commissioner Velez:

I am writing out of deep concern that your agency may reject critical federal funding for struggling New Jersey families. If New Jersey does not act soon, it will sacrifice more than \$5 million in federal funds that would help feed nearly 120,000 families in our state.

As you know, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), which is administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS) in New Jersey, directly benefits hundreds of thousands of residents in our state who rely on food stamps to feed their families. Funding is provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

New Jersey is currently covered by a blanket Standard Utilities Allowance (SUA) waiver that allows qualifying states to maintain the previous year's level for nutrition assistance benefits and prevent a reduction that would otherwise occur. Although this waiver was set to expire on September 30th, I joined with fourteen of my colleagues in the United States Senate to ask USDA to extend this waiver to provide additional support to our state's most vulnerable residents. On September 30th, USDA extended this waiver for the remainder of the calendar year.

The SUA waiver extension guarantees that needy New Jersey residents can continue to receive a higher level of nutritional assistance through the end of the year. It is estimated that, with this extension, 120,000 families in our state would receive a total of more than \$5 million in federal funding between now and the end of the year.

However, I am deeply disappointed to learn that DHS has indicated to USDA that New Jersey does not intend to take this extension. Rejecting the waiver and decreasing payments through the end of the year could force families that already live on the brink of poverty to cut back even further. The loss of even a few dollars a month takes food off the table and can seriously jeopardize the health of struggling families. This is unconscionable when there is assistance readily available.

I implore DHS to immediately accept the extension and utilize the resources that have been made available by the federal government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank R. Lautenberg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "F" and a long, sweeping underline.

cc: Governor Chris Christie