



November 13, 2023
<Sent via electronic mail>

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Certification Policy Branch
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RE: SNAP Forms: Applications, Periodic Reporting, and Notices, Federal Register 2023-19633

Dear Certification Policy Branch members,

The United Council on Welfare Fraud (UCOWF) is grateful for the opportunity to submit our comments to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Program Development Division’s Certification Policy Branch regarding the Notice titled, “SNAP Forms: Applications, Periodic Reporting, and Notices” dated September 12, 2023 (OMB Control Number: 0584-0064). UCOWF, a national professional membership association with a half-century legacy, is dedicated to combating waste, fraud, and abuse in our nation's public assistance programs. We represent local, state, and federal employees directly connected to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and tasked with upholding program integrity and stewardship of taxpayer resources.¹

As the exclusive national organization with a singular focus on detecting, preventing, prosecuting, and recovering welfare fraud, we have received direct responses from members on the burden and impact on notices to recipients. We request that this feedback be considered with other comments received.

In the process of renewing this information collection, FNS justifiably modified the burden of reporting and recordkeeping requirements to reflect current SNAP caseload levels and more recent or accurate data sources. However, the estimated burden increase of nearly 15 million hours to state and local SNAP agencies fails to adequately represent reporting burdens or address the root cause of the burden for three reasons:

1. The Request for Comments ignores a significant contributing factor to the burden placed on SNAP agencies as well as SNAP applicants/recipients – the 35 year-old outdated and antiquated Computer Matching Requirements established in [7 CFR 272.12](#). The USDA FNS is missing an opportunity to address the causal factor and enhance information collected through Federal legislation requests and new proposed regulations that currently prohibit “Federal Systems of Records” from being used in an efficient manner through ineffective communications between states.

¹ Our membership consists of over 1,500 local, state, and federal employees sworn law enforcement and non-sworn (civilian) investigators, analysts, and improper payment recovery subject matter experts. For the last 50 years, UCOWF provides annual training on program integrity best practices, fraud trends, and provide eligible members with the only professional certification in our field. More information about us can be found on our website, www.ucowf.net.





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- The burdens associated with the October 3, 2022, Interim Final Rule for the National Accuracy Clearinghouse (NAC) ignore the fact that USDA FNS intentionally disregarded Congress’ intent in the 2018 Farm Bill. The successful NAC Pilot with proven cost savings was ignored for a new and less effective “pilot” as demonstrated in UCOWF’s December 2, 2022, comments. The NAC demonstration project’s duplicate participation savings achieved administrative savings in part due to the FNS approved waiver allowing results to be considered “Verified Upon Receipt,” thereby allowing agencies to act on information in a timely manner and without the burdensome process FNS established in creating the prescriptive and onerous interim regulations in [7 CFR 272.18](#).

By ignoring the established regulations providing efficient notification and operating procedures addressing duplicate participation in [7 CFR 272.4\(e\)](#), USDA FNS has instead **created** an unnecessary reporting burden for agencies using the NAC for which they now request comments.

- The Request for Comments ignores the costs associated with the increased burdens to both SNAP agencies and recipients. A more accurate estimate methodology would consider the use of physical mail services (via the United States Postal Service, or USPS) versus electronic notices sent via e-mail. With the 2017 transition from a State Waiver to a State Option to use electronic mail in client notices, the USDA FNS justifiably made reporting and notices to clients more efficient.² However, this Request for Comment ignores the costs associated to the reporting burden estimated at over one billion hours. Cost estimates from member states ranged from **\$.56** to **\$.81** for postage and mail/scan services.

The fiscal cost of the physical notices, assuming only the price of a first-class USPS postage stamp, is **\$675,684,210.96**, with half the burden being assumed by low-income SNAP recipients/applicants. A more accurate time estimate should include real data from SNAP agencies, while including the costs associated with administrative costs for physical and electronic mailings. In addition, we feel the time estimate of “approximately 5 minutes” for a household to read and respond to notices to be unreasonably deficient and inaccurate due to the required “regulatory jargon” required in each notice. We are unaware of any actual time studies done in this regard.

It is with hope that the USDA FNS will instead look at ways to reduce the administrative burden placed upon both agencies and recipients through regulatory changes, particularly while Congress considers a new Farm Bill. If you have any questions, please contact us at UCOWFmail@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Carrol Christian, UCOWF President

² See USDA FNS memo titled, “Electronic Notice Waivers and Options” dated November 3, 2017. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/snap/Memo-Electronic-Notice-and-Other-Options-11317.pdf>