

**SEC. 11. 7 U.S.C. 2020 ADMINISTRATION.****(a) STATE RESPONSIBILITY.—**

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The State agency of each participating State shall have responsibility for certifying applicant households and issuing EBT cards.

(2) **LOCAL ADMINISTRATION.**—The responsibility of the agency of the State government shall not be affected by whether the program is operated on a State-administered or county administered basis, as provided under section 3(s)(1).

**(3) RECORDS.—**

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—Each State agency shall keep such records as may be necessary to determine whether the program is being conducted in compliance with this Act (including regulations issued under this Act).

(B) **INSPECTION AND AUDIT.**—All records, and the entire information systems in which records are contained, that are covered in subparagraph (A) shall—

(i) be made available for inspection and audit by the Secretary, subject to data and security protocols agreed to by the State agency and Secretary;

(ii) subject to subsection (e)(8), be available for review in any action filed by a household to enforce any provision of this Act (including regulations issued under this Act); and

(iii) be preserved for such period of not less than 3 years as may be specified in regulations.

**(4) REVIEW OF MAJOR CHANGES IN PROGRAM DESIGN.—**

(A) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall develop standards for identifying major changes in the operations of a State agency, including—

(i) large or substantially-increased numbers of low-income households that do not live in reasonable proximity to an office performing the major functions described in subsection (e);

(ii) substantial increases in reliance on automated systems for the performance of responsibilities previously performed by personnel described in subsection

(e)(6)(B);

(iii) changes that potentially increase the difficulty of reporting information under subsection (e) or section 6(c); and

(iv) changes that may disproportionately increase the burdens on any of the types of households described in subsection (e)(2)(A).

(B) **NOTIFICATION.**—If a State agency implements a major change in operations, the State agency shall—

(i) notify the Secretary; and

(ii) collect such information as the Secretary shall require to identify and correct any adverse effects on program integrity or access, including access by any of the types of households described in subsection (e)(2)(A).

(b) When a State agency learns, through its own reviews under section 16 or other reviews, or through other sources, that it has improperly denied, terminated, or underissued benefits to an eligible household, the State agency shall promptly restore any improperly denied benefits to the extent required by sections 11(e)(11) and 14(b), and shall take other steps to prevent a recurrence of such errors where such error was caused by the application of State agency practices, rules or procedures inconsistent with the requirements of this Act or with regulations or policies of the Secretary issued under the authority of this Act.

(c) CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLIANCE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In the certification of applicant households for the supplemental nutrition assistance program, there shall be no discrimination by reason of race, sex, religious creed, national origin, or political affiliation.

(2) RELATION TO OTHER LAWS.—The administration of the program by a State agency shall be consistent with the rights of households under the following laws (including implementing regulations):

(A) The Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. 6101 et seq.).

(B) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794).

(C) The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.).

(D) Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.).

(d) The State agency (as defined in section 3(s)(1)) of each State desiring to participate in the supplemental nutrition assistance program shall submit for approval a plan of operation specifying the manner in which such program will be conducted within the State in every political subdivision. The Secretary may not, as a part of the approval process for a plan of operation, require a State to submit for prior approval by the Secretary the State agency instructions to staff, interpretations of existing policy, State agency methods of administration, forms used by the State agency, or any materials, documents, memoranda, bulletins, or other matter, unless the State determines that the materials, documents, memoranda, bulletins, or other matter alter or amend the State plan of operation or conflict with the rights and levels of benefits to which a household is entitled. In the case of all or part of an Indian reservation, the State agency as defined in section 3(s)(1) shall be responsible for conducting such program on such reservation unless the Secretary determines that the State agency (as defined in section 3(s)(1)) is failing, subsequent to the enactment of this Act, properly to administer such program on such reservation in accordance with the purposes of this Act and further determines that the State agency as defined in section 3(s)(2) is capable of effectively and efficiently conducting such program, in light of the distance of the reservation from State agency-operated certification and issuance centers, the previous experience of such tribal organization in the operation of programs authorized under the Indian Self-Determination Act (25 U.S.C. 450) and similar Acts of Congress, the tribal organization's management and fiscal capabilities, and the adequacy of measures taken by the tribal organization to ensure that there shall be no discrimination in the operation of the program on the basis of race, color, sex, or national origin, in which event such State agency shall be responsible for conducting such program and submitting for approval a plan of operation specifying the manner in which such program will be conducted. The Secretary, upon the request of a tribal organization, shall provide the designees of such organization with appropriate training and technical assistance to enable them to qualify as expeditiously as possible as a State agency pursuant to section 3(s)(2). A State agency, as defined in section 3(s)(1), before it submits its plan of operation to the Secretary for the administration of the supplemental nutrition assistance program on all or part of an Indian reservation, shall consult in good faith with the tribal organization about that portion of the State's plan of operation pertaining to the implementation of the program for members of the tribe, and shall implement the program in a manner that is responsive to the needs of the Indians on the reservation as determined by ongoing consultation with the tribal organization.

(e) The State plan of operation required under subsection (d) of this section shall provide, among such other provisions as may be required by regulation—

(1) that the State agency shall—

- (A) at the option of the State agency, inform low-income households about the availability, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and benefits of the supplemental nutrition assistance program; and
- (B) comply with regulations of the Secretary requiring the use of appropriate bilingual personnel and printed material in the administration of the program in those portions of political subdivisions in the State in which a substantial number of members of low-income households speak a language other than English;
- (2)(A) that the State agency shall establish procedures governing the operation of supplemental nutrition assistance program offices that the State agency determines best serve households in the State, including households with special needs, such as households with elderly or disabled members, households in rural areas with low-income members, homeless individuals, households residing on reservations, and households in areas in which a substantial number of members of low-income households speak a language other than English.
- (B) In carrying out subparagraph (A), a State agency—
- (i) shall provide timely, accurate, and fair service to applicants for, and participants in, the supplemental nutrition assistance program;
  - (ii)(I) shall develop an application containing the information necessary to comply with this Act; and
  - (II) if the State agency maintains a website for the State agency, shall make the application available on the website in each language in which the State agency makes a printed application available;
  - (iii) shall permit an applicant household to apply to participate in the program on the same day that the household first contacts a supplemental nutrition assistance program office in person during office hours;
  - (iv) shall consider an application that contains the name, address, and signature of the applicant to be filed on the date the applicant submits the application;
  - (v) shall require that an adult representative of each applicant household certify in writing, under penalty of perjury, that—
    - (I) the information contained in the application is true; and
    - (II) all members of the household are citizens or are aliens eligible to receive supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits under section 6(f);
  - (vi) shall provide a method of certifying and issuing benefits to eligible homeless individuals, to ensure that participation in the supplemental nutrition assistance programs limited to eligible households; and
  - (vii) may establish operating procedures that vary for local supplemental nutrition assistance program offices to reflect regional and local differences within the State.
- (C) 11 ELECTRONIC AND AUTOMATED SYSTEMS.—
- (i) IN GENERAL.—Nothing in this Act shall prohibit the use of signatures provided and maintained electronically, storage of records using automated retrieval systems only, or any other feature of a State agency’s application system that does not rely exclusively on the collection and retention of paper applications or other records.
  - (ii) STATE OPTION FOR TELEPHONIC SIGNATURE.—A State agency may establish a system by which an applicant household may sign an application through a recorded verbal assent over the telephone.
  - (iii) REQUIREMENTS.—A system established under classes (ii) shall—

- (I) record for future reference the verbal assent of the household member and the information to which assent was given;
  - (II) include effective safeguards against impersonation, identity theft, and invasions of privacy;
  - (III) not deny or interfere with the right of the household to apply in writing;
  - (IV) promptly provide to the household member written copy of the completed application, with instructions for a simple procedure for correcting any errors or omissions;
  - (V) Comply with paragraph (1)(B);
  - (VI) satisfy all requirements for a signature on an application under this Act and other laws applicable to the supplemental nutrition assistance program, with the date on which the household member provides verbal assent considered as the date of application for all purposes; and
  - (VII) comply with such other standards as the Secretary may establish.
- (D) The signature of any adult under this paragraph shall be considered sufficient to comply with any provision of Federal law requiring a household member to sign an application or statement;
- (3) that the State agency shall thereafter promptly determine the eligibility of each applicant household by way of verification of income other than that determined to be excluded by section 5(d) of this Act (in part through the use of the information, if any, obtained under section 16(e) of this Act and after compliance with the requirement specified in paragraph (24)), household size (in any case such size is questionable), and such other eligibility factors as the Secretary determines to be necessary to implement sections 5 and 6 of this Act, although the State agency may verify prior to certification, whether questionable or not, the size of any applicant household and such other eligibility factors as the State agency determines are necessary, so as to complete certification of and provide an allotment retroactive to the period of application to any eligible household not later than thirty days following its filing of an application, and that the State agency shall provide each applicant household, at the time of application, a clear written statement explaining what acts the household must perform to cooperate in obtaining verification and otherwise completing the application process;
- (4) that the State agency shall insure that each participating household receive a notice of expiration of its certification prior to the start of the last month of its certification period advising the household that it must submit a new application in order to renew its eligibility for a new certification period and, further, that each such household which seeks to be certified another time or more times thereafter by filing an application for such recertification no later than fifteen days prior to the day upon which its existing certification period expires shall, if found to be still eligible, receive its allotment no later than one month after the receipt of the last allotment issue to it pursuant to its prior certification, but if such households found to be ineligible or to be eligible for a smaller allotment during the new certification period it shall not continue to participate and receive benefits on the basis authorized for preceding certification period even if it makes a timely request for a fair hearing pursuant to paragraph (10) of this subsection: *Provided*, That the timeliness standards for submitting the notice of expiration and filing an application for recertification may be modified by the Secretary in light of sections 5(f)(2) and 6(c) of this Act if administratively necessary;
- (5) the specific standards to be used in determining the eligibility of applicant households which shall be in accordance with sections 5 and 6 of this Act and shall include no additional requirements imposed by the State agency;
- (6) that—

(A) the State agency shall undertake the certification of applicant households in accordance with the general procedures prescribed by the Secretary in the regulations issued pursuant to this Act; and

(B) the State agency personnel utilized in undertaking such certification shall be employed in accordance with the current standards for a Merit System of Personnel Administration or any standards later prescribed by the Office of Personnel Management pursuant to section 208 of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act of 1970 (42 U.S.C.4728) modifying or superseding such standards relating to the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards on a merit basis;

(7) that an applicant household may be represented in the certification process and that an eligible household may be represented in benefit issuance or food purchase by a person other than a member of the household so long as that person has been clearly designated as the representative of that household for that purpose, by the head of the household or the spouse of the head, and, where the certification process is concerned, the representative is an adult who is sufficiently aware of relevant household circumstances, except that the Secretary may restrict the number of households which may be represented by an individual and otherwise establish criteria and

verification standards for representation under this paragraph;

(8) safeguards which prohibit the use or disclosure of information obtained from applicant households, except that—

(A) the safeguards shall permit—

(i) the disclosure of such information to persons directly connected with the administration or enforcement of the provisions of this Act, regulations issued pursuant to this Act, Federal assistance programs, or federally-assisted State programs; and

(ii) the subsequent use of the information by persons described in clause (i) only for such administration

or enforcement;

(B) the safeguards shall not prevent the use or disclosure of such information to the Comptroller General of the United States for audit and examination authorized by any other provision of law;

(C) notwithstanding any other provision of law, all information obtained under this Act from an applicant household shall be made available, upon request, to local, State or Federal law enforcement officials for the purpose of investigating an alleged violation of this Act or any regulation issued under this Act;

(D) the safeguards shall not prevent the use by, or disclosure of such information, to agencies of the Federal Government(including the United States Postal Service) for purposes of collecting the amount of an over issuance of

Benefits, as determined under section 13(b) of this Act, from Federal pay (including salaries and pensions) as authorized pursuant to section 5514 of title 5 of the United States Code or a Federal income tax refund as authorized by section 3720A of title 31, United States Code;

(E) notwithstanding any other provision of law, the address, social security number, and, if available, photograph of any member of a household shall be made available, on request, to any Federal, State, or local law enforcement officer if the officer furnishes the State agency with the name of the member and notifies the agency that—

(i) the member—

(I) is fleeing to avoid prosecution, or custody or confinement after conviction, for a crime (or attempt to commit a crime) that, under the law of the place the member is fleeing, is a felony (or, in the case of New Jersey, a high misdemeanor), or is violating a condition of probation or parole imposed under Federal or State law; or

(II) has information that is necessary for the officer to conduct an official duty related to sub clause (I);

(ii) locating or apprehending the member is an official duty; and

(iii) the request is being made in the proper exercise of an official duty; and

(F) the safeguards shall not prevent compliance with paragraph (15) or (18)(B) or subsection (u);

(9) that the State agency shall—

(A) provide benefits no later than 7 days after the date of application to any household which—

(i)(I) has gross income that is less than \$150 per month; or

(II) is a destitute migrant or a seasonal farmworker household in accordance with the regulations governing such households in effect July 1, 1982; and

(ii) has liquid resources that do not exceed \$100;

(B) provide benefits no later than 7 days after the date of application to any household that has a combined gross income and liquid resources that is less than the monthly rent, or mortgage, and utilities of the household; and

(C) To the extent practicable, verify the income and liquid resources of a household referred to in subparagraph (A) or (B) prior to issuance of benefits to the household;

(10) for the granting of a fair hearing and a prompt determination thereafter to any household aggrieved by the action of the State agency under any provision of its plan of operations it affects the participation of such household in the supplemental nutrition assistance program or by a claim against the household for an over issuance: *Provided*, That any household which timely requests such a fair hearing after receiving individual notice of agency action reducing or terminating its benefits within the household's certification period shall continue to Participate and receive benefits on the basis authorized immediately prior to the notice of adverse action until such time as the fair hearing is completed and an adverse decision rendered Or until such time as the household's certification period terminates, whichever occurs earlier, except that in any case in which the State agency receives from the household a written statement containing information that clearly requires a reduction or termination of the household's benefits, the State agency may act immediately to reduce or terminate the household's Benefits and may provide notice of its action to the households late as the date on which the action becomes effective. At the option of a State, at any time prior to a fair hearing determination under this paragraph, a household may withdraw, orally or in writing, a request by the household for the fair hearing. If the withdrawal request is an oral request, the State agency shall provide a written notice to the household confirming the withdrawal request and providing the household with an opportunity to request a hearing;

(11) upon receipt of a request from a household, for the prompt restoration in the form of benefits to a household of any allotment or portion thereof which has been wrongfully denied or terminated, except that allotments shall not be restored for any period of time more than one year prior to the date the State agency receives a request for such restoration from a household or the State agency is notified or otherwise discovers that a loss to a household has occurred;

- (12) For the submission of such reports and other information as from time to time may be required by the Secretary;
- (13) For indicators of expected performance in the administration of the program;
- (14) that the State agency shall specify a plan of operation for providing supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits for households that are victims of a disaster; that such plan shall include, but not be limited to, procedures for informing the public about the disaster program and how to apply for its benefits, coordination with Federal and private disaster relief agencies and local government officials, application procedures to reduce hardship and inconvenience and deter fraud, and instruction of caseworkers in procedures for implementing and operating the disaster program;
- (15) Notwithstanding paragraph (8) of this subsection, for the immediate reporting to the Immigration and Naturalization Service by the State agency of a determination by personnel Responsible for the certification or recertification of households that any member of a household is ineligible to receive supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits because that member is present in the United States in violation
- (16) at the option of the State agency, for the establishment and operation of an automatic data processing and information retrieval system that meets such conditions as the Secretary may prescribe and that is designed to provide efficient and effective administration of the supplemental nutrition assistance program;
- (17) at the option of the State agency, that information may be requested and exchanged for purposes of income and eligibility verification in accordance with a State system which Meets the requirements of section 1137 of the Social Security Act and that any additional information available from agencies administering State unemployment compensation laws under the provisions of section 303(d) of the Social Security Act may be requested and utilized by the State agency described in section 3(s)(1) to the extent permitted under the provisions Of section 303(d) of the Social Security Act;
- (18) That the State agency shall establish a system and  
Take action on a periodic basis—
- (A) To verify and otherwise ensure that an individual does not receive benefits in more than 1 jurisdiction within the State; and
- (B) to verify and otherwise ensure that an individual who is placed under detention in a Federal, State, or local penal, correctional, or other detention facility for more than 30 days shall not be eligible to participate in the supplemental nutrition assistance program as a member of Any household, except that—
- (I) the Secretary may determine that extraordinary circumstances make it impracticable for the State agency to obtain information necessary to discontinue inclusion of the individual; and
- (ii) a State agency that obtains information collected under section 1611(e)(1)(I)(I)(I) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1382(e)(1)(I)(I)(I)) pursuant to section 1611(e)(1)(I)(ii)(II) of that Act (42 U.S.C.1382(e)(1)(I)(ii)(II)), or under another program determined by the Secretary to be comparable to the program carried out under that section, shall be considered in compliance with this subparagraph.
- (19) the plans of the State agency for carrying out employment and training programs under section 6(d)(4), including the nature and extent of such programs, the geographic areas And households to be covered under such program, the extent to which such programs will be carried out in coordination with the activities carried out under title I of the Workforce Innovation

And Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3111 et seq.), and the basis, including any cost information, for exemptions of categories and individuals and for the choice of employment and training program components reflected in the plans;

(20) in a project area in which 5,000 or more households participate in the supplemental nutrition assistance program, for the establishment and operation of a unit for the detection of fraud in the supplemental nutrition assistance program, including the investigation, and assistance in the prosecution, of such fraud;

(21) at the option of the State, for procedures necessary to obtain payment of uncollected over issuance of benefits from unemployment compensation pursuant to section 13(c);

(22) The guidelines the State agency uses in carrying out section 6(I);

(23) If a State elects to carry out a simplified supplemental nutrition assistance program under section 26, the plans of the State agency for operating the program, including—

(A) The rules and procedures to be followed by the State agency to determine supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits;

(B) How the State agency will address the needs of households that experience high shelter costs in relation to the incomes of the households; and

(C) A description of the method by which the State agency will carry out a quality control system under section 16(c);

(24) That the State agency shall request wage data directly from the National Directory of New Hires established under section 453(I) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 653(I)) relevant to determining eligibility to receive supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits and determining the correct amount of those benefits at the time of certification;

(25) if the State elects to carry out a program to contract with private establishments to offer meals at concessional prices, as described in paragraphs (3), (4), and (9) of section 3(k)—

(A) The plans of the State agency for operating the program, including—

(I) documentation of a need that eligible homeless, elderly, and disabled clients are underserved in a particular geographic area;

(ii) the manner by which the State agency will limit participation to only those private establishments that the State determines necessary to meet the need identified in clause (I); and  
(iii) any other conditions the Secretary may prescribe, such as the level of security necessary to ensure that only eligible recipients participate in the program; and

(B) A report by the State agency to the Secretary annually, the schedule of which shall be established by the Secretary, that includes—

(I) the number of households and individual recipients authorized to participate in the program, including any information on whether the individual recipients elderly, disabled, or homeless; and

(ii) An assessment of whether the program is meeting an established need, as documented under Subparagraph (A) (I); and

(26) That for a household participating in the supplemental nutrition assistance program, the State agency shall pursue clarification and verification, if applicable, of information relating to the circumstances of the household received from data matches for the purpose of ensuring an accurate eligibility and benefit determination, only if the information—

(A) Appears to present significantly conflicting information from the information that was used by the State agency at the time of certification of the household;

(B) Is obtained from data matches carried out under subsection (q), (r), or (x); or  
(C)(I) is less than 60 days old relative to the current month of participation of the household; and  
(ii) If accurate, would have been required to be reported by the household based on the reporting requirements assigned to the household by the State agency  
Under section 6(c).

(g) If the Secretary determines, upon information received by the Secretary, investigation initiated by the Secretary, or investigation that the Secretary shall initiate upon receiving sufficient information evidencing a pattern of lack of compliance by a State agency of a type specified in this subsection, that in the administration of the supplemental nutrition assistance program there is a failure by a State agency without good cause to comply with any of the provisions of this Act, the regulations issued pursuant to this Act, the State plan of operation submitted pursuant to subsection (d) of this section, the State plan for automated data processing submitted pursuant to subsection (o) (2) of this section, or the requirements established pursuant to section 23 of this Act, the Secretary shall immediately inform such State agency of such failure and shall allow the State agency a specified period of time for the correction of such failure. If the State agency does not correct such failure within that specified period, the Secretary may refer the matter to the Attorney General with a request that injunctive relief be sought to require compliance forthwith by the State agency and, upon suit by the Attorney General in an appropriate district court of the United States having jurisdiction of the geographic area in which the State agency is located and a showing that noncompliance has occurred, appropriate injunctive relief shall issue, and, whether or not the Secretary refers such matter to the Attorney General, the Secretary shall proceed to withhold from the State such funds authorized under sections 16(a), 16(c), and 16(g) of this Act as the Secretary determines to be appropriate, subject to administrative and judicial review under section 14 of this Act.

(h) If the Secretary determines that there has been negligence or fraud on the part of the State agency in the certification of applicant households, the State shall, upon request of the Secretary, deposit into the Treasury of the United States, a sum equal to the face value of any benefits issued as a result of such negligence or fraud.

**(I) APPLICATION AND DENIAL PROCEDURES.—**

(1) **APPLICATION PROCEDURES.**—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, households in which all members are applicants for or recipients of supplemental security income shall be informed of the availability of benefits under the supplemental nutrition assistance program and be assisted in making a simple application to participate in such program at the social security office and be certified for eligibility utilizing information contained in files of the Social Security Administration.

(2) **DENIAL AND TERMINATION.**—except in a case of disqualifications a penalty for failure to comply with a public assistance program rule or regulation, no household shall have its application to participate in the supplemental nutrition assistance program denied nor its benefits under the supplemental nutrition assistance program terminated solely on the basis that its application to participate has been denied or its benefits have been terminated under any of the programs carried out under the statutes specified in the second sentence of section 5(a) and without a separate determination by the State agency that the household fails to satisfy the eligibility requirements for participation in the supplemental nutrition assistance Program.

(j)(1) Any individual who is an applicant for or recipient of supplemental security income or social security benefits (under regulations prescribed by the Secretary in conjunction with the Commissioner of Social Security) shall be informed of the availability of benefits under the supplemental nutrition assistance program and informed of the availability of a simple application to participate in such program at the social security office.

(2) The Secretary and the Commissioner of Social Security shall revise the memorandum of understanding in effect on the date of enactment of the Food Security Act of 1985, regarding services to be provided in social security offices under this subsection and subsection (I), in a manner to ensure that—

(A) applicants for and recipients of social security benefits are adequately notified in social security offices that assistance may be available to them under this Act;

(B) Applications for assistance under this Act from households in which all members applicants are for or recipients of supplemental security income will be forwarded immediately to The State agency in an efficient and timely manner; and

(C) The Commissioner of Social Security receives from the Secretary reimbursement for costs incurred to provide such services.

(k) Subject to the approval of the President, post offices in all or part of the State may provide, on request by the State agency, supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits to eligible households.

(l) Whenever the ratio of a State's average supplemental nutrition assistance program participation in any quarter of a fiscal year to the State's total population in that quarter (estimated on the basis of the latest available population estimates as provided by Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Series P-25, Current Population Reports (or its successor series)) exceeds 60 percent the Department of Agriculture shall immediately schedule a financial audit review of sample of project areas within that State. Any financial audit review subsequent to the first such review, required under the preceding sentence, shall be conducted at the option of the Office of the Inspector General.

(m) The Secretary shall provide for the use of free agents in rural Alaska. As used in this subsection "fee agent" means a paid agent who, although not a State employee, is authorized by the State to make applications available to low-income households, assisting the completion of applications, conduct required interviews, secure required verification, forward completed applications and supporting documentation to the State agency, and provide other services as required by the State agency. Such services shall not include making final decisions on household eligibility or benefit levels.

(n) The Secretary shall require State agencies to conduct verification and implement other measures where necessary, but no less often than annually, to assure that an individual does not receive both benefits and benefits or payments referred to in section 6(g) or both benefits and assistance provided in lieu of benefits under section 17(b)(1).

(o)(1) The Secretary shall develop, after consultation with, and with the assistance of, an advisory group of State agencies appointed by the Secretary without regard to the provisions of the

Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App. 2), a model plan for the comprehensive automation of data processing and computerization of information systems under the supplemental nutrition assistance program. The plan shall be developed and made available for public comment through publication of the proposed plan in the Federal Register not later than October 1, 1986. The Secretary shall complete the plan, taking into consideration public

comments received, not later than February 1, 1987. The elements of the plan may include intake procedures, eligibility determinations and calculation of benefits, verification procedures, coordination with related Federal and State programs, the issuance of benefits, reconciliation procedures, the generation of notices, and program reporting. In developing the plan, the Secretary shall take into account automated data processing and information systems already in existence in States and shall provide for consistency with such systems.

(2) Not later than October 1, 1987, each State agency shall develop and submit to the Secretary for approval a plan for the use of an automated data processing and information retrieval system to administer the supplemental nutrition assistance program in such State. The State plan shall take into consideration the model plan developed by the Secretary under paragraph (1) and shall provide time frames for completion of various phases of the State plan. If a State agency already has a sufficient automated data processing and information retrieval system, the State plan may, subject to the Secretary's approval, reflect the existing State system.

(3) Not later than April 1, 1988, the Secretary shall prepare and submit to Congress an evaluation of the degree and sufficiency of each State's automated data processing and computerized information systems for the administration of the supplemental nutrition assistance program, including State plans submitted under paragraph (2). Such report shall include an analysis of additional steps needed for States to achieve effective and cost-efficient data processing and information systems. The Secretary, thereafter, shall periodically update such report.

(4) Based on the Secretary's findings in such report submitted under paragraph (3), the Secretary may require a State agency, as necessary to rectify identified shortcomings in the administration of the supplemental nutrition assistance program in the State, except where such direction would displace State initiatives already underway, to take specified steps to automate data processing systems or computerize information systems for the administration of the supplemental nutrition assistance program in the State if the Secretary finds that, in the absence of such systems, there will be program accountability or integrity problems that will substantially affect the administration of the supplemental nutrition assistance program in the State.

(5)(A) Subject to subparagraph (B), in the case of a plan for an automated data processing and information retrieval system submitted by a State agency to the Secretary under paragraph (2), such State agency shall—

(i) commence implementation of its plan not later than October 1, 1988; and

(ii) meet the time frames set forth in the plan.

(B) The Secretary shall extend a deadline imposed under subparagraph (A) to the extent the Secretary deems appropriate based on the Secretary's finding of a good faith effort of a State agency to implement its plan in accordance with subparagraph (A).

(p) STATE VERIFICATION OPTION.—In carrying out the supplemental nutrition assistance program, a State agency shall be required to use an immigration status verification system established under section 1137 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1320b-7), and an income and eligibility verification system, in accordance with standards set by the Secretary.

(q) DENIAL OF BENEFITS FOR PRISONERS.—The Secretary shall assist States, to the maximum extent practicable, in implementing a system to conduct computer matches or other systems to prevent prisoners described in subsection (e)(18)(B) from participating in the supplemental nutrition assistance program as a member of any household.

(r) DENIAL OF BENEFITS FOR DECEASED INDIVIDUALS.—Each State agency shall—

(1) enter into a cooperative arrangement with the Commissioner of Social Security, pursuant to the authority of the Commissioner under section 205(r)(3) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 405(r)(3)), to obtain information on individuals who are deceased; and

(2) use the information to verify and otherwise ensure that benefits are not issued to individuals who are deceased.

(s) TRANSITIONAL BENEFITS OPTION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—A State agency may provide transitional supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits—

(A) to a household that ceases to receive cash assistance under a State program funded under part A of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.); or

(B) at the option of the State, to a household with children that ceases to receive cash assistance under a State funded public assistance program.

(2) TRANSITIONAL BENEFITS PERIOD.—Under paragraph (1), a household may receive transitional supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits for a period of not more than 5 months after the date on which cash assistance is terminated.

(3) AMOUNT OF BENEFITS.—During the transitional benefits period under paragraph (2), a household shall receive an amount of supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits equal to the allotment received in the month immediately preceding the date on which cash assistance was terminated, adjusted for the change in household income as a result of—

(A) the termination of cash assistance; and

(B) at the option of the State agency, information from another program in which the household participates.

(4) DETERMINATION OF FUTURE ELIGIBILITY.—In the final month of the transitional benefits period under paragraph (2), the State agency may—

(A) require the household to cooperate in a recertification of eligibility; and

(B) initiate a new certification period for the household without regard to whether the preceding certification period has expired.

(5) LIMITATION.—A household shall not be eligible for transitional benefits under this subsection if the household—

(A) loses eligibility under section 6;

(B) is sanctioned for a failure to perform an action required by Federal, State, or local law relating to a cash assistance program described in paragraph (1); or

(C) is a member of any other category of households designated by the State agency as ineligible for transitional benefits.

(6) APPLICATIONS FOR RECERTIFICATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—A household receiving transitional benefits under this subsection may apply for recertification at any time during the transitional benefits period under paragraph (2).

(B) DETERMINATION OF ALLOTMENT.—If a household applies for recertification under subparagraph (A), the allotment of the household for all subsequent months shall be determined without regard to this subsection.

(t) GRANTS FOR SIMPLIFIED APPLICATION AND ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION SYSTEMS AND IMPROVED ACCESS TO BENEFITS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to the availability of appropriations under section 18(a), for each fiscal year, the Secretary shall use not more than \$5,000,000 of funds made available

under section 18(a)(1) to make grants to pay 100 percent of the costs of eligible entities approved by the Secretary to carry out projects to develop and implement supplemental nutrition assistance program simplified application and eligibility determination systems.

(2) TYPES OF PROJECTS.—A project under paragraph (1) may consist of—

(A) coordinating application and eligibility determination processes, including verification practices, under the supplemental nutrition assistance program and other Federal, State, and local assistance programs;

(B) establishing enhanced technological methods that improve the administrative infrastructure used in processing applications and determining eligibility; or

(C) carrying out such other activities as the Secretary determines to be appropriate.

(3) LIMITATION.—A grant under this subsection shall not be made for the ongoing cost of carrying out any project.

(4) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—To be eligible to receive a grant under this subsection, an entity shall be—

(A) a State agency administering the supplemental nutrition assistance program;

(B) a State or local government;

(C) an agency providing health or welfare services;

(D) a public health or educational entity; or

(E) a private nonprofit entity such as a community based organization, food bank, or other emergency feeding organization.

(5) SELECTION OF ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—The Secretary—

(A) shall develop criteria for the selection of eligible entities to receive grants under this subsection; and

(B) may give preference to any eligible entity that consists of a partnership between a governmental entity and a nongovernmental entity.

(u) AGREEMENT FOR DIRECT CERTIFICATION AND COOPERATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Each State agency shall enter into an agreement with the State agency administering the school lunch program established under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.).

(2) CONTENTS.—The agreement shall establish procedures that ensure that—

(A) any child receiving benefits under this Act shall be certified as eligible for free lunches under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.) and free breakfasts under the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1771 et seq.), without further application; and

(B) each State agency shall cooperate in carrying out paragraphs (3)(F) and (4) of section 9(b) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758(b)).

(v) DATA EXCHANGE STANDARDS FOR IMPROVED INTEROPERABILITY.—

(1) DESIGNATION.—The Secretary shall, in consultation with an interagency work group established by the Office of Management and Budget, and considering State government perspectives, designate data exchange standards to govern, under this Act—

(A) necessary categories of information that State agencies operating related programs are required under applicable law to electronically exchange with another State agency; and

(B) Federal reporting and data exchange required under applicable law.

(2) REQUIREMENTS.—The data exchange standards required by paragraph (1) shall, to the maximum extent practicable—

(A) incorporate a widely accepted, nonproprietary, searchable, computer-readable format, such as the eXtensible Markup Language;

(B) contain interoperable standards developed and maintained by intergovernmental partnerships, such as the National Information Exchange Model;

(C) incorporate interoperable standards developed and maintained by Federal entities with authority over contracting and financial assistance;

(D) be consistent with and implement applicable accounting principles;

(E) be implemented in a manner that is cost-effective and improves program efficiency and effectiveness; and

(F) be capable of being continually upgraded as necessary.

(3) RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this subsection requires a change to existing data exchange standards for Federal reporting found to be effective and efficient.

(w) For households containing at least one adult, with no elderly or disabled members and with no earned income at their last certification or required report, a State agency shall, at the time of recertification, be required to advise members of the household not exempt under section 6(d)(2) regarding available employment and training services.

(x) NATIONAL ACCURACY CLEARINGHOUSE.—

(1) DEFINITION OF INDICATION OF MULTIPLE ISSUANCE.—In this subsection, the term “indication of multiple issuance” means an indication, based on a computer match, that supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits are being issued to an individual by more than 1 State agency simultaneously.

(2) ESTABLISHMENT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish an interstate data system, to be known as the “National Accuracy Clearinghouse”, to prevent multiple issuances of supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits to an individual by more than 1 State agency simultaneously.

(B) DATA MATCHING.—The Secretary shall require that State agencies make available to the National Accuracy Clearinghouse only such information as is necessary for the purpose described in subparagraph (A).

(C) DATA PROTECTION.—The information made available by State agencies under subparagraph (B)—

(i) shall be used only for the purpose described in subparagraph (A);

(ii) shall be exempt from the disclosure requirements of section 552(a) of title 5 of the United States Code pursuant to section 552(b)(3) of title 5 of the United States Code, to the extent such information is obtained or received by the Secretary;

(iii) shall not be retained for longer than is necessary to accomplish the purpose in subparagraph (A);

(iv) shall be used in a manner that protects the identity and location of a vulnerable individual (including a victim of domestic violence) that is an applicant for, or recipient of, supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits; and

(v) shall meet security standards as determined by the Secretary.

(3) ISSUANCE OF INTERIM FINAL REGULATIONS.—Not later than 18 months after the date of enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, the Secretary shall promulgate regulations(which shall include interim final regulations) to carryout this subsection that—

- (A) incorporate best practices and lessons learned from the pilot program under section 4032(c) of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (7 U.S.C. 2036c(c));
  - (B) require a State agency to take appropriate action, as determined by the Secretary, with respect to each indication of multiple issuance of supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits, or each indication that an individual receiving such benefits in 1 State has applied to receive such benefits in another State, while ensuring timely and fair service to applicants for, and recipients of, such benefits;
  - (C) establish standards to limit and protect the information submitted through or retained by the National Accuracy Clearinghouse consistent with paragraph (2)(C);
  - (D) establish safeguards to protect—
    - (i) the information submitted through or retained by the National Accuracy Clearinghouse, including by limiting the period of time that information is retained to the period necessary to accomplish the purpose described in paragraph (2)(A); and
    - (ii) the privacy of information that is submitted through or retained by the National Accuracy Clearinghouse consistent with subsection (e)(8); and
  - (E) include such other rules and standards the Secretary determines appropriate to carry out this subsection.
- (4) **TIMING.**—The initial match and corresponding actions required by paragraph (3)(B) shall occur within 3 years after the date of the enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018.