

## Office of the Special Master

**Gemmell v. Hawkins, C. A. No. 16-650 WES**

April 9, 2018

Bonnie Brathwaite, Director  
U. S. Department of Agriculture  
Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program  
Northeast Region  
10 Causeway Street  
Boston, MA 02222

Re: Rhode Island Department of Human Services  
Gemmell v. Hawkins, C. A. No. 16-650

Dear Ms. Brathwaite:

On April 3, 2018, Courtney Hawkins, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services ("DHS"), sent you a letter requesting expedited approval of FNS for the engagement of a private company to augment current staffing levels with non-merit personnel in the Call Center based in Pawtucket, RI. The DHS is currently operating under a Consent Agreement entered into in February 2017 that requires DHS to come into compliance with the SNAP timeliness standards set forth therein, and I have been appointed Special Master to oversee that compliance.

DHS has been addressing a number of problems relating to the SNAP program, one of which is the serious wait times (often more than 2 hours) experienced by applicants seeking information about their SNAP applications and other programs for which they may be eligible. On March 2, 2018, as I believe you are aware, I issued an Order to DHS to remedy the Call Center problem by the use of an outside vendor to reduce the wait times experienced by applicants. I believe this is critical to the SNAP program, and I expect that this short-term engagement will reduce call times forthwith.

I strongly encourage FNS to approve the DHS proposal as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration.

Deming E. Sherman



Special Master

cc Courtney Hawkins, Director, Department of Human Services  
Deborah Barkley, General Counsel, Department of Human Services