



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Food and
Nutrition
Service

Northeast Region

10 Causeway St.
Room 501
Boston, MA 02222

Courtney Hawkins, Director
Department of Human Services
Louis Pasteur Building
57 Howard Avenue
Cranston, RI 02920

SEP 26 2017

Dear Ms. Hawkins:


The Rhode Island (RI) Department of Human Services (DHS) recently notified the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) about two separate issues that could affect the State's timely implementation of the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2018 Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for approximately 25,000 RI households (nearly one-third of the State's caseload). This letter serves to remind DHS that the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (the Act), as amended, requires the COLA to be implemented annually on October 1.

Regarding the two issues identified by the State, one involves a technical defect that is currently preventing the successful application of the COLA to approximately 13,000 households. The second issue involves approximately 12,000 cases for which the State has determined that application of the FFY 2018 COLA could result in incorrect termination or benefit issuance. The State has indicated to FNS that it might delay the COLA for these households beyond the October 1 date required by federal statute.

Delaying implementation of the COLA beyond October 1, 2017 would be a clear violation of the Act. FNS issued a letter to DHS on August 23, 2017 detailing the State's responsibility for over-issuances resulting from major systemic failures. In accordance with that letter and Section 13(b)(5) of the Act, if the State fails to implement the COLA for all households timely, it will be liable for any over-issuances that result, in addition to any other identified over-issuances resulting from systemic failures. FNS expects to receive a final update on the status of these issues from DHS prior to October 1, 2017.

As always, FNS is available to provide technical assistance as needed. Please contact Bonnie Brathwaite at (617) 565-6397 with any questions.

Sincerely,


Kurt Messner
Regional Administrator
Northeast Region

cc: Iwona Ramian, RI DHS