



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Rhode Island Department of Human Services
Office of the Director

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July 24, 2017

Bonnie Brathwaite, Director
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
USDA/FNS Northeast Region
10 Causeway Street, Room 501
Boston, MA 02222

RE: REQUEST FOR DISCRETIONARY REDUCTION OF BILL FOR COLLECTION

Dear Director Brathwaite:

As previously discussed, the State of Rhode Island is formally requesting a discretionary reduction of disallowed Design, Development and Implementation costs for contract amendments associated with the Rhode Island UHIP (Unified Health Infrastructure Project) Bridges Project. The State of Rhode Island Department of Human Services has made good faith efforts toward system stabilization and improved workforce productivity, despite budgetary constraints. In light of these efforts, the State respectfully requests a discretionary reduction in disallowed costs from \$805,197 to \$150,000.

The Department of Human Services' (DHS) highest priority is to provide Rhode Islanders with timely and accurate access to public assistance benefits. As such, the State has welcomed collaboration with FNS on contract matters related to the UHIP Bridges Project, as well as on notice issues and other system stabilization efforts. Through at least weekly phone calls and frequent site visits, continued partnership and collaboration between the state and FNS has supported substantial progress within the SNAP program.

As you are aware, DHS has implemented a hiring surge of approximately 143 positions to continue system stabilization and improve customer service. Approximately 72 of these positions require and leverage SNAP-related expertise and skills in order to effectively and efficiently work SNAP cases. DHS has invested considerably in training and retention of SNAP program skills to ensure that new or returning hires are able to process SNAP cases effectively.

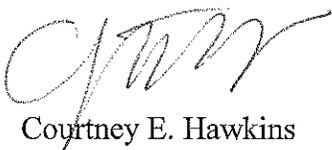
These steps have allowed for significant improvements in application processing for Rhode Island public assistance programs, including the SNAP program, since go-live.

As of July 3, 2017, the total number of pending public assistance applications declined to 5,781, a nearly 28 percent decline in one month. More specifically in the SNAP program, as of July 17, 2017, there were only 694 pending SNAP applications (194 expedited and 500 non-expedited). At the end of May 2017, there were 1,415 pending SNAP applications. This reduction represents an approximately 50 percent decline in pending SNAP applications over a month and a half period. Additionally, of the pending expedited SNAP applications, as of July 7, 2017, only 65 were overdue pending a DHS worker's action. Of the pending non-expedited SNAP applications for the same time period, only 80 of these applications were overdue pending a DHS worker's action.

These continued improvements are representative of the continued investment of time, money and resources that DHS devotes to the SNAP program. Despite an unexpected revenue shortfall in fiscal year 2017, the state has continued to make investments and improvements within DHS, demonstrating its continued commitment toward increasing access to and support of program beneficiaries. In fact, DHS, with FNS' guidance, will reinvest the disallowed cost amount by procuring and engaging a partner with expertise in customer service, lobby management practices, and business process redesign in order to make further improvements in DHS performance. However, as a result of ongoing fiscal challenges of revenue shortfalls and budgetary constraints, DHS respectfully requests a discretionary reduction of the reinvestment amount from \$805,197 to \$150,000. The State asserts that the efforts and outcomes described above demonstrate good faith efforts to improve customer experience and respectfully requests consideration of these factors through consideration of this request.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me directly. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Courtney E. Hawkins
Director, RI Department of Human Services

cc: Kurt Messner, NERO Administrator
Eric Beane, Secretary, RI EOHHS
Iwona Ramian, SNAP Administrator, RI DHS
Matthew Henschel, Policy Team Lead, NERO