



June 16, 2011

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HHSC EARNS \$6.2 MILLION IN INCENTIVES FOR ACCURACY IN SNAP PAYMENTS

(AUSTIN, Texas) — Today, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack awarded performance bonuses to the states with the best payment accuracy rates in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) in fiscal 2010. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) earned \$6.2 million in payment incentives for its performance in two categories: best payment accuracy and most improved payment accuracy. Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPPP) Senior Policy Analyst Celia Cole released the following statement.

“CPPPP applauds HHSC Executive Commissioner Tom Suehs for his leadership, and HHSC’s frontline staff for their hard work in achieving this recognition. At 97.87 percent, Texas’ payment accuracy rate was above the national average of 96.19 percent. (Payment accuracy is measured by the amount of benefits issued accurately as a share of total benefits issued.) And at 4.77 percent, Texas’ tops the nation in most improved accuracy rate.

“Texas has not received a SNAP performance bonus since 2004, when the Legislature’s decision to partially privatize the eligibility system and significantly reduce staffing levels sent the system into a tailspin. From late 2005 through 2009, HHSC’s overworked eligibility staff struggled to deliver timely and accurate benefits, delaying or improperly denying assistance to hundreds of thousands of needy Texans. In late 2009, a federal lawsuit and demand for corrective action from USDA prompted the Legislature to approve additional staff and authorize Executive Commissioner Suehs to make key policy changes to reduce workload and improve efficiency.

“Today’s award is a testament to Executive Commissioner Suehs’ leadership and commitment to rebuild the system. It also underscores the importance of providing sufficient resources to ensure effective program administration. We urge the Legislature to maintain its commitment to a strong eligibility system, which will face increasing demand for services due to the ongoing economic downturn and implementation of national health care reform. Beginning in 2014, health care reform is projected to eventually increase Texas Medicaid enrollment by approximately 50 percent. In addition, the system will need to interact with private health insurance enrollment systems.

“SNAP benefits are essential to the nutrition and well-being of one-in-seven people in Texas. They also provide an economic stimulus that strengthens our economies and communities. Research shows that every \$5 in SNAP benefits generates as much as \$9 in economic activity. It is estimated that at least 8,900 full-time jobs are created from \$1 billion of SNAP benefits.”

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About

The Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPPP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy institute committed to improving public policies to better the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans. Learn more at www.cphp.org.