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# Congress of the United States

House of Representatives  
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COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
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CHAIR OF THE CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC  
CAUCUS CIVIL RIGHTS TASK FORCE

July 18, 2005

The Honorable Eric Bost  
Under Secretary  
Food and Nutrition Service  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-0002

Dear Under Secretary Bost:

As you know, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission is moving ahead with its plan to close several local eligibility offices where Texans apply for Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families with privatized call centers. I understand that the City of San Antonio is slated to become one of four cities where a new call center will be located.

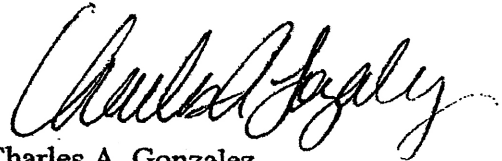
The plan to close these local offices raises several concerns, especially about the quality of service constituents will receive with a call center as opposed to a staffed office. In many instances, residents may need a face-to-face interview, especially for the elderly and those who might have language or other communication barriers. In addition, call centers can be very difficult to navigate which might have the effect of dissuading those who might need help from seeking it. Moreover, staffed locations will have trained eligibility workers who are knowledgeable in other available resources that might help those most in need. In a face-to-face interview, applicants can be informed of all possible assistance available to them. Lastly, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission has claimed that some initial application steps could be done via on-line systems with the assistance of volunteers in community organizations or through local libraries. In light of limited resources for most organizations nowadays, I am concerned about the ability of these volunteer organizations to provide the most comprehensive assistance to residents seeking aid.

Taking into consideration these concerns, how will the state of Texas ensure that all residents, especially in rural areas, will have full access to food stamps and other programs under a call center system? Do you have a list of which offices will be closed and a list of where staffed offices will be located? Are there any precedents to

demonstrate that a call-center based system can be successful for determining food stamp eligibility?

Thank you for giving these comments your utmost attention. I look forward to hearing from you soon. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Stephanie Smith, the staffer handling this matter, at (210)472-6195.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles A. Gonzalez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "C".

Charles A. Gonzalez  
Member of Congress

CAG:ss