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STATE AUDITOR'S REPORT ON SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROVIDES BLUEPRINT FOR FIXING ELIGIBILITY SYSTEM

The State Auditor's office released a [report](#) today on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). The report provides a blueprint for restoring access to SNAP (formerly called Food Stamps) and fixing the state's eligibility and enrollment system for SNAP, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance. HHSC's Executive Commissioner Tom Suehs requested the audit to inform his efforts to end severe delays in SNAP application processing. *The delays cause food hardship to tens of thousands of needy Texans struggling to feed their families in the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.*

The auditor's report criticizes HHSC for failing to meet federal standards for timeliness and accuracy in SNAP benefit determinations and identifies two primary contributors:

- Inefficiencies in the eligibility determination process, and
- Lack of an experienced, well-trained, and adequately supervised workforce.

The report identifies a combination of business processes, technology, and workforce improvements to improve timeliness and overall system performance. The audit notes that Texas received \$27 million in supplemental federal funding this year for the administration of SNAP and recommends HHSC use the funds to implement the report's recommendations for salaries, training, and technology.

The center supports the report's overall conclusions and recommendations, which provide a strong foundation for fixing our eligibility system. However, we note the following key issues were not addressed by the audit.

- The report does not address needed **policy simplifications**, which are critical to a successful modernization effort. Accomplished by eliminating unnecessary or outdated rules and making rules consistent across program, policy simplifications can reduce workload, facilitate the use of new technology, and improve clients' access to benefits.
- The report does not explicitly address the **need for additional staff**. Although it makes sound recommendations for mitigating the effects of an inexperienced workforce and improving the recruitment and retention of experienced staff, the system still has about 1,000 fewer staff than it did 10 years ago, yet serves roughly one million additional clients.

We therefore urge the Legislature to include policy simplification and additional resources for staff in the roadmap for change.

The center applauds Commissioner Suehs for requesting the audit and for his efforts to improve access to SNAP. Commissioner Suehs has demonstrated his commitment to make the changes that are needed to fix our eligibility system, and we urge the Legislature to commit the resources that he needs to be successful. Fixing the eligibility system is critical not only to prevent further hardship today, but also to lay a strong foundation for the successful implementation of national health care reform, which will add one million Texans to our Medicaid program over the next few years.

For background on the problems in our eligibility system, please read our latest [report](#).