

F. JAMES SENSENBRENNER, JR.

FIFTH DISTRICT, WISCONSIN

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Congress of the United States  
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Washington, DC 20515-4905

September 14, 2016

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The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Among other important programs under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to deliver much-needed assistance to Americans at a precarious point in their lives.

SNAP relies on cooperation from private retailers or grocers who accept government payments through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards and distribute eligible food items to SNAP beneficiaries. In previous years, the EBT card's function was filled by physical food stamps.

Recently, a federal grand jury indicted multiple individuals in Baltimore, Maryland in connection with a practice known as "food stamp trafficking," through which FNS-approved retailers and grocers exchange EBT funds for cash without delivering food to hungry Americans, or after greatly inflating food costs. Some reports indicate that SNAP was defrauded to the tune of \$16 million in taxpayer funds in connection with these Maryland fraudsters.

According to a 2012 press release, USDA has actively and successfully combatted food stamp trafficking. The possibility for fraud exists when government distributes money, and it is always incumbent on government to safeguard the public's trust by good administration. I commend USDA for the work it has already done to increase efficiency and reduce fraud in SNAP, and I am interested in seeing USDA reach greater successes in combatting fraud.

I understand the importance of SNAP benefits for Americans. SNAP funds are dedicated to ensuring we stamp out hunger, and we must take strong action to keep the system clear of criminal activity. In the interest of guaranteeing SNAP funds go to feeding hungry people, I am asking about USDA's activities to keep known fraudsters from repeatedly committing the same offenses. Does USDA:

1. maintain a comprehensive list of locations or addresses at which fraudulent activities have occurred?
2. maintain a comprehensive list of retail store owners and operators who have committed fraudulent activities?
3. cross-reference applications to become FNS-approved retailers with any existing list of retailers who may have committed SNAP fraud, or with any existing list of locations at which systematic fraud has occurred?
4. have processes and procedures in place to suspend or scrutinize retailers who may be discovered to have connections with previous cases of fraud?

I am pleased to see USDA taking action to shore up the public's trust in its administration of taxpayer funds. I look forward to reviewing your response to these questions, and expect to receive your response by October 29, 2016. It is my hope that our cooperation results in a reduced burden for the American taxpayer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.", written over a large, stylized loop.

F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.  
Member of Congress