

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 17, 2015

Ms. Audrey Rowe
Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
3101 Park Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22302

Administrator Rowe:

It has been brought to our attention through a recent media investigation¹ in the state of Ohio that some Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cardholders have accumulated unused balances upwards of twenty thousand dollars. Given that the average monthly household benefit in fiscal year 2015 was only \$257, these alarmingly high balances have raised concerns about the county level management of the program, as well as the federal and state oversight and collaboration efforts within SNAP.

Under current law, 7 U.S.C. 2016(h)(12)(C), state agencies must expunge benefits from a SNAP participant's EBT card after a rolling twelve-month calendar period if the funds have not been accessed. It is possible that some cardholder's balances have increased significantly due to the twelve-month requirement currently in place, allowing the card to automatically regenerate the assistance within a certified period.

The House acted to make sure the program's assistance goes to those in most need, with increased oversight by the states and USDA during the 2014 Farm Bill negotiations. The House proposed to expunge unused benefits after 60 days, but unfortunately, this important provision was removed when the House and Senate bills were combined during conference. The result of removing the 60-day expunction has been made clear in the news investigation prompting this letter.

We believe that a lapse in effective oversight has resulted in inappropriate use of a promising program. We also believe that the expunging of benefits on a rolling twelve-month calendar is leading to inflated costs of the SNAP program because program dollars are going unused. It is a concern that some individuals are not utilizing these funds during the calendar month in which they were received. Furthermore, we ask that further investigation into this matter be conducted in order to understand where the money goes and how it is spent once expunged from the accounts.

The ability of a cardholder to spend their remaining balance nearly a year after receiving those benefits is alarming considering the high cost to taxpayers of this assistance program. Given the emphasis on reforms to the program in the 2014 Farm Bill, it is our

¹ [10TV Columbus. 10 Investigates Discovers Families with Massive Food Benefit Balances](#)

request that the Food and Nutrition Service investigate how recipients were able to accumulate substantial unused balances given the statutory requirement to expunge benefits after the twelve-month period of assistance ends.

Additionally, it is our understanding that states have the ability, yet not the requirement, to suspend accounts upon six consecutive months of inactivity. We request information on which states do and do not use this tool, how many accounts were suspended after six months of inactivity, and the average balance of those accounts.

Because of the potential for misconduct, we are also referring this matter to the Inspector General. Your prompt consideration of this request is greatly appreciated.

We look forward to finding areas to improve this federally funded assistance program in order to be good stewards of our taxpayer dollars and provide assistance to those that are eligible.

Sincerely,



Bob Gibbs
Member of Congress



Dan Benishek, M.D.
Member of Congress



Tim Huelskamp
Member of Congress



Steve Chabot
Member of Congress



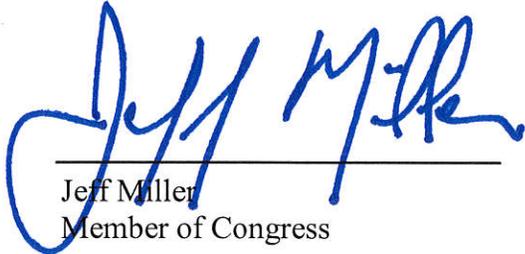
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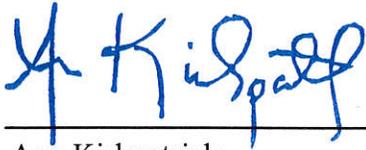
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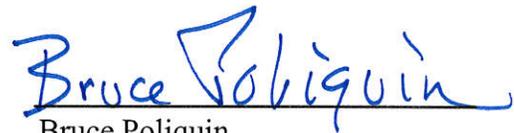
Darrell Issa
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Luke Messer
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Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Bruce Poliquin
Member of Congress

cc: Phyllis Fong, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Agriculture
K. Michael Conaway, Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture