

February 28, 2006

SUBJECT: Guidance for Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 Program Access Reviews

TO: Regional Directors
Food Stamp Program

This is to provide guidance on conducting Food Stamp Program (FSP) Program Access Reviews for fiscal year (FY) 2006. In order to continue to focus Program Access Reviews on the localities most at risk for problems and to use our resources prudently, the changes that were instituted last year will remain in effect.

Regional offices are no longer required to adhere to the previously established review schedule for Program Access Reviews (reviews of large States once every two years and reviews in small States once every three years). While Regional offices are required to conduct Program Access Reviews in only one State per Region per year, this is a minimum. More reviews may be necessary. Regional offices should review additional States as necessary based on the determination that a State's operations have changed in some way and may be at risk for having reduced Program access. When determining which State to review, Regional offices should consider such factors as recent staffing cuts, contracted out services, high client complaint rates, increased high client to eligibility worker ratios, and advocate concerns. In addition to Program Access Reviews, Regional offices are still required to conduct biennial onsite observations of State Agency Management Evaluation (ME) reviews of local offices, paying close attention to how well the State is evaluating Program access. In combination, Regional offices are expected to conduct Program Access Reviews in 4 local offices per region. These reviews may be traditional on-site access reviews or may be done as a component of the Region's required biennial reviews of State's ME systems.

Program access remains an agency priority. Conducting formal Program Access Reviews as well as reviewing Program access as part of the States' ME process should help to ensure adequate coverage of local offices and help to identify any widespread or pervasive problems with Program access.

As soon as you identify your schedule for FY 2006 Program Access Reviews, please send it to us. Staff from headquarters may want to participate in a review or may be available to assist you if needed. Please note the contact person for Program access has recently changed. Please contact Moira Johnston at (703) 305-2515 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

/s/

Arthur T. Foley
Director
Program Development Division