

JUN 30 2004

SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2005 Program Access Reviews

TO: Regional Directors
Food Stamp Program

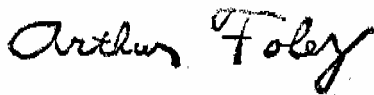
This is to provide guidance on conducting Food Stamp Program (FSP) Program Access reviews for fiscal year (FY) 2005. In order to further focus Program Access reviews on the localities most at risk for problems, we are proposing a change in how regional offices select localities for these reviews.

Regional offices would no longer be required to adhere to the review schedule for Program Access reviews (reviews of large States (caseloads above 100,000) once every two years and reviews in States with caseloads below 100,000 once every three years). Instead, States would be selected for review based on the regional office's determination that a State's operations have changed and may be at risk for having reduced program access. Factors regional offices would consider in making this determination are recent staffing cuts, contracted out services, high client complaint rates, high client to eligibility worker ratios, and advocate concerns. A minimum of one State per regional office would receive a Program Access review each year. More reviews may be needed in some regional offices. There would be no other changes to the review guide at this time. Regions will continue to conduct onsite observations of Management Evaluation (ME) reviews conducted at one local site per State, as part of the review of each State's ME system.

Program access remains an agency priority. We anticipate that we will work through the FY 2005 COMPASS planning process to set expectations for reviewing States with high negative case error rates. We are hopeful that the new selection criteria will enable regional offices to effectively and prudently use limited resources in this important national priority area. As has been the case in previous years, the review of Program access as part of the States' ME process should help to ensure more coverage of local offices and help to identify any widespread or pervasive problems with Program access.

Please let us know which States you plan to conduct Program Access reviews in as soon as they are identified through FY 2005. As in the past, there may be headquarters staff that may want to participate in a review. At any time there is a need for additional staff to participate in a review, please contact Dale Walton at (703) 305-2432 (<mailto:dale.walton@fns.usda.gov>) and she will attempt to find appropriate headquarters staff to assist.

Sincerely,



Arthur T. Foley
Director
Program Development Division