

Kristin Robbins
State Representative
District 37A



Minnesota
House of
Representatives

August 31, 2026

The Honorable Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable John Walk
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Via electronic delivery

Dear Secretary Rollins and Inspector General Walk,

I am writing regarding USDA's approval of Minnesota's SNAP Telephonic Signature Waiver, which Minnesota recently announced has been extended through June 30, 2028.

Federal policy allows states to use telephonic signatures to improve access to SNAP and reduce administrative burdens. Under the standard process, however, a telephonic signature is supported by an audio recording of the household member's verbal assent that is linked to the application. Minnesota's waiver allows the state to document that verbal attestation in the case record instead of maintaining an audio recording.

Minnesota first began using this flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when unrecorded verbal signatures were permitted as part of emergency program administration. In 2022, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) established a broader waiver process allowing states to continue using alternative methods of documenting telephonic signatures in place of an audio recording. USDA has cited administrative and technological burdens associated with creating and maintaining audio records, as well as the potential for delays in establishing an applicant's filing date. I understand those considerations, but I would appreciate a better understanding of USDA's rationale for continuing to approve this flexibility on an ongoing basis now that the emergency conditions that initially prompted its use have passed.

In particular, I would appreciate your perspective on how USDA weighs the administrative benefits of eliminating the audio-recording requirement against the value of maintaining an independent record of an applicant's attestation. I am also concerned about the use of telephonic signatures more generally. Given Minnesota's recent history of rampant fraud in federal programs and the refusal by the Walz Administration to turn over SNAP data to the Dept. of Agriculture for independent verification, as well as recent documented fraud cases involving SNAP, I would urge you to consider tightening oversight, not continuing this waiver, which is only in use in thirteen states.

I would also appreciate clarification of what safeguards USDA considers sufficient to deter identity theft, theft of SNAP benefits, or disputes over what information an applicant actually provided when no audio recording exists. Mitigating the lack of a recording by having an application mailed to the address provided over the phone, without identity verifications, merely serves to send confirmations to an identity thief. I am also concerned about the potential impact to proving false application information in an Administrative Disqualification Hearing when the only evidence an applicant applied is a system entry from an eligibility worker.

This question seems particularly relevant given the Administration's emphasis on strengthening SNAP program integrity and preventing fraud, waste, and abuse. I strongly support those efforts and would like to help ensure that USDA's continued approval of this waiver remains consistent with those goals.

I also respectfully ask that USDA OIG consider a comprehensive review of currently active SNAP waivers. In its January 2023 audit of the SNAP waiver process, OIG found that FNS did not consistently document waiver policies and procedures or meet Departmental recordkeeping requirements, reducing assurance that approved waivers complied with statutory and regulatory requirements. A renewed review could assess whether existing waivers remain justified, whether the circumstances supporting their approval still apply, and whether the safeguards attached to them adequately protect program integrity.

Thank you for your leadership and attention to this issue. I look forward to your reply and am happy to assist in your efforts to improve program integrity in any way.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristin Robbins", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Representative Kristin Robbins

Chair, Fraud Prevention and State Agency Oversight Policy Committee

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