



June 19, 2009

Dear Friends:

Last June Project Bread asked the Massachusetts Councils on Aging to help spread the word about changes to the Food Stamp program. You did, and the response was unprecedented. Our FoodSource Hotline received thousands of calls from seniors, many of whom have since applied and been approved for benefits, and are now able to buy more of the foods that they need and enjoy.

We want to update you on some of the changes that have taken place since last June. For one thing, the name of the program has been changed from "Food Stamps" to the "Supplemental Food Assistance Program," or SNAP. This name change emphasizes that SNAP is a nutrition program that is meant to supplement the food budget for those of limited means.

Another change is that the benefits increased in April as a result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Those receiving the minimum benefit of \$14 received a slight increase to \$16, but those receiving a higher amount saw their benefits jump by \$24 for a household of one or \$44 for a household of two. This increase not only helps the recipient but also is money that goes right back into the economy.

The third change is that the income guidelines were increased in April as well. Many callers have specifically mentioned having income below the guideline of \$1,734. That guideline has been increased to \$1,805 for a household of one and \$2,429 for a household of two. Households with gross incomes below those amounts are not subject to an asset test (i.e. they will not be made ineligible due to their assets) however those with income-producing assets should understand that the income from the assets will be included in their total income.

It is important to note that income is only one factor in the SNAP calculation. We need information about some of their expenses, such as housing and medical expenses, to determine their eligibility for benefits.

We are attaching a chart, similar to the one we sent out last year, but with updated income guidelines. Although it is difficult to explain the SNAP guidelines on paper, our FoodSource Hotline counselors will take the time to explain the program and eligibility guidelines and answer any questions the callers may have. Please let people know that they can call the **FoodSource Hotline at 1-800-645-8333** for more information.

Thank you for your assistance.

***FoodSource Hotline***