

The Vermont congressional delegation today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture will further postpone a pending reduction in food stamp benefits for 16,000 Vermonters. Sens. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) also welcomed the USDA's assurance that, once the extended waiver expires on April 1, no family will see a benefit reduction of more than \$20 per month.

Sanders and Leahy authored a [letter](#) signed by 13 other senators asking White House budget director Jacob Lew to reconsider the administration's plan to cut to nutrition assistance benefits under Vermont's "3SquaresVT" program. Welch authored a similar [letter](#) from members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

The senators urged Lew to "pursue a course that will sustain the existing level of benefits to help these families make it through this difficult winter season." The senators further noted that any cut to nutrition assistance would come on top of possible additional cuts to fuel assistance received by Vermont families. Welch echoed those sentiments, writing that cuts could "reduce significantly the nutrition assistance benefits that many of our constituents rely on to feed their families during difficult economic times."

This September, the USDA announced that the State of Vermont would be required to implement a cut of as much 25 percent to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits received by 16,000 Vermont families starting on January 1. The department's decision was based on declining home utility costs which factor into the food stamp benefits formula. Around the country, at least 2 million people would also have seen a reduction in their food stamp benefit.

In August 2009, the Department of Agriculture issued a waiver that allowed states to use the 2008 utility allowance formula for 2009, which would have prevented a drastic cut in nutrition assistance for millions of families around the country. Seventeen states, including Vermont, took advantage of this waiver, which had been set to expire on October 1, but after the urging of Sanders, Leahy and Welch, that waiver had been extended to January 1, 2011.

Angela Smith-Dieng, senior nutrition and policy specialist for the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, said, "We are very grateful to Vermont's congressional delegation for its

leadership in preventing what could have been a significant benefit cut to hungry Vermonters this winter. In these difficult times, Vermonters are already struggling to pay for all their expenses, so having enough money for basic needs like food and heat is essential to their health and well-being. Seniors and people with disabilities on fixed incomes are especially vulnerable to these kinds of cuts and would have been hardest hit, so we very much appreciate the delegation's strong advocacy on this issue."