

Debra Thompson

From: Bill Tremblay <brtrembla@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 16, 2023 4:28 PM
To: Assembly
Subject: Update on Federal SNAP program in Alaska

I wrote the Assembly a couple of weeks ago regarding my concern for people not receiving their federal SNAP support (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program). In addition to writing you I wrote to Governor Dunleavy, our Congressional Delegation, and spoke with our incoming State Representative. I did get a call from someone who works with the State to discuss my concerns.

In general, as reported by KTOO reports shared on public radio, there are several issues regarding the stoppage in these payments and with the reinstatement of future payments. The problems include; a cyber attack on their computer systems in 2021, changes to eligibility by the Federal government given the reduction of impacts by the pandemic, having many of the applications for assistance coming at the end of a 90 day open period, and lack of staffing to process applications. Another complication noted by the State employee was a requirement by the Federal government to require an interview with applicants before the applications could be processed. While these reasons could justify some delays in payments to families in need, it still doesn't help those families.

I talked with Liz Cabrera about this issue. (She was off on medical leave when the first two (of three) KTOO reports were broadcast.) At the time, it was reported that many families had not received their support payments since October and State Officials were saying that many applications could take another 120 days to process. (I found out that some payments actually stopped in September.) This meant that some families could be missing this needed support for up to 7 months!

According to information Liz shared with me, approximately 10% of Petersburg's population is partially supported with SNAP program. These are funds unavailable to some of our neediest residents during the winter.

There may not be anything the Borough could do to help except to suspend any late fees that might be charged regarding delays for payment of city services. I understand that payments to applicants could be made retroactive to the time when they were eligible but in the meantime, I'm sure some folks are struggling to get by.

The SNAP program is Federally funded. Not having enough staff in place to process these applications is a direct result of the Governor's policies to reduce the size of government overall. What we're seeing here is a direct result of how harm can be caused by not having adequate staff in place. I know the Assembly has allocated some PPP dollars to help address some Child Care issues, are there any funds to help provide food assistance while families wait to have their applications for SNAP funding processed?

Thanks for allowing me to express my concern.

Sincerely,

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