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ODJFS Takes Lead in Preventing Food Assistance Fraud

COLUMBUS, OHIO – Ohio’s food assistance program outperforms most other states in payment accuracy, error rates and numbers of replacement benefit cards issued, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) announced today. In fact, according to a recent federal report, only 12 states issued fewer replacement cards per household than Ohio.

“We are extremely proud of this record, and of our performance in administering this program,” said ODJFS Director Michael B. Colbert. “Our Food Assistance staff do a tremendous job.”

ODJFS uses a variety of proven methods to deter and detect fraud in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly called the SNAP or food stamp program. ODJFS also partners with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to identify and punish those convicted of stealing or misusing food assistance.

Ohio distributes food assistance through an electronic card system called the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system. Any EBT card reported lost, stolen or damaged is immediately deactivated, and the account is frozen. Food assistance beneficiaries are instructed to report lost or stolen cards immediately, and ODJFS does not, under any circumstance, replenish benefits for or provide additional benefits to an individual whose EBT card was lost or stolen and misused. Instead, families are issued a replacement card. This new card contains only the unused balance in the individual’s account and is printed and mailed at no additional cost to taxpayers.

Individuals with unusually high replacement card requests are flagged and reported for review. In addition, the EBT system recognizes bar codes and prevents individuals from using an EBT card to purchase alcohol, tobacco and other prohibited items. ODJFS also monitors out-of-state transactions, transactions outside of normal business hours and exceeded PIN attempts, and the agency partners with the Ohio Department of Public Safety to investigate retailer fraud and EBT card trafficking.

Depending on the amount of benefits involved, individuals convicted of defrauding the program can be fined up to \$250,000, sent to jail for up to 20 years, or both. Any individual found selling or misusing food assistance could be banned for life from collecting food assistance.

Food Assistance is entirely federally funded. In 2011, Ohio distributed nearly \$3 billion in food assistance to more than 850,000 families. Beneficiaries must earn 130 percent or less of the federal poverty level, about \$24,220 for a family of four.

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