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### **Ohio's Food Assistance Program Better than National Average for Payment Accuracy**

COLUMBUS, OHIO – Ohio had one of the best payment accuracy rates in the nation in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2011 for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) announced today. The U.S. Department of Agriculture sent a letter congratulating Ohio for having a payment error rate of only 3.4 percent, which was below the national average of 3.8 percent.

“This is great news for those we serve and for Ohio taxpayers, as well,” said ODJFS Director Michael Colbert. “A low error rate means that the people who need and are eligible for food assistance are getting it, and in the correct amounts. Ohio’s county departments of job and family services are doing an excellent job of administering this program.”

ODJFS supervises the county agencies in the administration of SNAP, which distributes more than \$2.95 billion in food assistance to about 1.8 million Ohioans, more than half of them children. In Ohio, recipients use an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card—the Ohio Direction Card—to buy most food or food products, with the exception of alcohol, tobacco and hot food. Although the federal government pays for all benefits, states provide about half of the program’s administrative costs. Ohio’s error rate has been below the national average each year since FFY 2008.

Keeping error rates low is the first step in preventing overpayments and deterring fraud. After benefits have been distributed, ODJFS takes additional steps to prevent misuse. Individuals with unusually high replacement card requests are flagged and reported for review, and new federal rules should soon allow ODJFS to require them to explain why they need a replacement card if they ask for four new cards within a 12-month period. ODJFS also partners with the Ohio Department of Public Safety to investigate retailer fraud and EBT card trafficking and monitors for out-of-state transactions, exceeded PIN attempts and another anomalies.

Individuals convicted of defrauding the SNAP program can be banned for life from collecting food assistance, fined up to \$250,000, and sent to jail for up to 20 years.

“Proper administration of this important nutrition assistance program results in public confidence as we work together to provide services to needy Americans,” said Kevin Concannon, Under Secretary of Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He added that Ohio’s efforts and success in payment accuracy for food assistance recipients are greatly appreciated.

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