



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Governor Cuomo Announces New York State to End Finger Imaging Requirement for Food Stamp Recipients

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Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced that New York State will end the finger imaging requirement for all food stamp applicants and recipients, helping simplify the application process and removing a barrier to reducing hunger among the state's children and adults.

Statewide, one in six children live in homes without enough food on the table. Yet 30 percent of New Yorkers eligible for food stamps — over 1.4 million people — do not receive them, leaving over \$1 billion in federal funds unclaimed every year. In his 2012 State of the State message, Governor Cuomo pledged to increase participation in the food stamp program, including removing barriers to participation and eliminating stigmas associated with the program. Eliminating the finger imaging requirement will make it easier for additional New Yorkers in need to apply for food stamp benefits.

"There is never an excuse for letting any child in New York go to bed hungry," Governor Cuomo said. "For too long, requiring finger imaging from those eligible for food stamp benefits has created an unnecessary barrier to participation in the program, causing a negative stigma and keeping food off the table for those in need. By removing this barrier, additional New Yorkers in need will be able to access the benefits they deserve without having to submit to this unneeded and burdensome requirement."

Finger imaging has been a known deterrent to participation in the Food Stamp Program due to the negative connotations, including the perceived implication of criminality. Additionally, finger imaging can be an impediment to employment and child care because parents may have to take time off from work and obtain additional child care coverage in order to complete the requirement. Before the Governor's action, New York and Arizona were the only two states in the country to impose this requirement.

Removing barriers to food stamp enrollment – including reducing the use of finger imaging – can have a

positive economic impact on New York. According to a 2010 study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, \$5 in new food stamp benefits can generate \$9 in total community spending, and every additional dollar's worth of food stamp benefits generates 17 to 47 cents of new spending on food. By increasing access to food stamps, eliminating the finger imaging requirement will benefit families as well as the state and local economies.

In April, the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) put in place a new statewide system for determining food stamp eligibility that uses applicant information to allow case workers to resolve discrepancies and prevent duplicate participation. This new system complies with the federal requirement to prevent duplication of food stamp benefits and similar programs have been credited as being less costly than finger imaging and potentially more effective at detecting duplicate participation.

At the Governor's direction, OTDA has proposed regulations that would eliminate the finger imaging for the receipt of food stamp benefits. The proposed regulations are being filed today and will be available for a 45-day public comment period before being finalized. Under the proposed regulations, counties will no longer need waivers to be exempted. The proposed regulations apply to the entire state.