



## Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee

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### 60th Montana Legislature

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PAT MURDO, Staff for SJR 15

July 1, 2008

Hank Hudson, Administrator  
Human and Community Services Division  
Department of Public Health and Human Services  
111 N. Jackson St.  
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Mr. Hudson,

The Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee has voted to support changes in Food Stamp eligibility standards that will allow more Montanans to take part in this important program. Because food is a basic necessity, the committee members believe it's vital that the state ensures that as many Montanans have access to the program as possible.

At a presentation to our committee earlier this month, Minkie Medora outlined several issues of importance to the Montana Food Bank Network and the Montana Dietetic Association, including an expansion of Food Stamps to a greater number of Montanans. Ms. Medora noted that federal laws and rules give states latitude in setting the eligibility standards for Food Stamps. She also pointed out that many states have taken advantage of this flexibility to increase income and asset standards and to expand categorical eligibility to entire groups of people.

Montana's low-income families are facing increasing economic pressure with the recent rise in gas prices and the corresponding increases in food prices. Montana's food banks are also feeling the pinch, both through increased demand for their services and an increase in their costs of providing services.

All of those factors make the Food Stamp program an even more critical part of the safety net for low-income Montana families. Thus committee members were encouraged to learn that the Human and Community Services Division is looking into this issue.

The Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee strongly supports your efforts. The committee voted in June to encourage the department to act as quickly as possible to revise its rules for the Food Stamp program, in order to eliminate the asset test and increase the income eligibility level to the maximum allowed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture guidelines. We hope you will take every possible step to make this program as widely available as possible.

Sincerely,

Rep. Edith Clark, Presiding Officer

c: Brian Schweitzer, Governor  
Joan Miles, Director, Department of Public Health and Human Services

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