



For Immediate Release:

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New York Seeks to Deny Food Stamps to Thousands during Holiday Season

New York, New York – November 21, 2006 - Following recent court victories, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) clarified that thousands of poor New York families are eligible for fully federally-funded transitional food stamp benefits (TBA). Instead of taking advantage of this clarification, New York State continues to deny these families food stamps for no legitimate reason.

The New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) brought a federal court case, Walker v. Eggleston, in 2004 as a class action challenging the New York City's Human Resources Administration's (HRA's) failure to provide TBA to cash assistance recipients who HRA places in with jobs with the Parks Department. For the past several years, HRA has been placing cash assistance recipients with the Parks Department in temporary, six month jobs paying \$7.50 an hour. Since it started this program, HRA has placed several thousand families with the Parks Department.

TBA is a federal program established in 2002 that currently allows states to freeze for five months the food stamp benefits of families who leave cash assistance. HRA and the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) had claimed that, for technical reasons, families who HRA placed with the Parks Department were ineligible for TBA. The USDA has now clarified that HRA and OTDA were legally wrong. Despite this, the OTDA recently reiterated its position of denying POP workers TBA food stamps.

Failure to provide TBA food stamps causes Parks works severe hardship. For example, when the City placed lead plaintiff Tanya Walker in a Parks job, HRA reduced her food stamps from \$256 to \$94 a month – a \$162 per month reduction.

According to Randal S. Jeffrey, Director of NYLAG's General Legal Services Unit: "The additional food stamp benefits provided by TBA would help ensure that families working for the Parks Department have access to adequate food while trying to make ends meet in a low-wage job." The USDA echoed this reasoning in agreeing that Parks workers are eligible for TBA, noting that providing TBA "would ease the transition from welfare to work by providing households with the same food stamp benefits amount."

"It is particularly mean-spirited that New York has chosen to deny food stamps to those eligible during the holiday season," added Mr. Jeffrey. "We certainly hope that Governor-elect Spitzer will reverse this draconian decision."

About NYLAG

Founded in 1990, the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) is a not-for-profit law office providing free civil legal services to low income New Yorkers. For more information on NYLAG, please visit <http://www.nylag.org>

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