

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Gov't Shutdown: Food Stamp, School Lunch, To Be Funded Through February, U.S.D.A. Says

VIC News / **Published On January 14, 2019 11:23 AM /**

Staff **January 14, 2019**



The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps, and the school lunch program that feeds students in the territory's public schools, will be funded through February even as the longest government shutdown in U.S. history continues.

That's according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.), through which SNAP and the school lunch program are funded. There were fears that the programs would run out of money because of the shutdown. However, the Trump administration announced last week that it had come up with a way to fund the more than \$4.8 billion in benefits through February, with the benefits being paid out on January 20 -- weeks earlier than

usually issued.

Acting Deputy Undersecretary at U.S.D.A., Brandon Lipps, said other U.S.D.A. programs will also be funded through February, including food distribution programs on Indian reservations and child nutrition programs, the latter of which includes WIC, which provides nutritional assistance to pregnant women, mothers and babies.

Under the provision, the SNAP program will operate as it normally does and without any lapse in service, but with the earlier Jan. 20 deadline for states to request benefits through a process called early issuance. That process is typically used during natural disasters, Mr. Lipps said, enabling states anticipating hurricanes or other weather events to distribute monthly benefits ahead of time, according to The Times.

Mr. Lipps said the U.S.D.A. is sending letters to all state agencies to explain the process and will issue a blanket waiver of department regulations to allow for the early issuance.

"We don't know of any time this has ever happened," said Hannah Walker speaking to Politico. Ms. Hannah is the senior director of technology and nutrition policy at the Food Marketing Institute, which represents retailers like Kroger, Walmart and Safeway.

According to Politico, grocery retailers across the country are preparing for a potential onslaught of SNAP shoppers beginning next week, and making sure they have enough food stocked and employees on hand to handle the volume. SNAP purchases account for nearly 10 percent of all grocery business in the U.S. each year, according to recent estimates.