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# Plaskett Crafting Update to Sen. Francis on the Potential Impact of New SNAP Work Requirements for Adults

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Robert Moore **December 13, 2019**

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett said she is crafting a response to V.I. Senate President Novelle Francis's letter seeking counsel on how the territory can shield itself from drastic impact from pending changes to the federal SNAP food program.

Territory officials sounded an alarm after the Trump administration [last week released rule-making changes](#) to increase restrictions and tighten waivers for the current SNAP work requirements for adults.

Under the proposed changes, hundreds of Virgin Islanders could become ineligible to receive the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as SNAP or food stamps.

“I will work with the VI government agencies to ensure we will continue to receive the same relevant waiver,” Ms. Plaskett said. “As a member of the Agriculture Committee which has oversight of SNAP, my colleagues and I are watching this issue.”

For now, the Virgin Islands has a waiver from work rules because of the territory’s high unemployment rate. The waiver allows individuals who might not normally be eligible to receive food assistance through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Program.

Ms. Plaskett said the territory’s most recent USDA SNAP waiver lasts through March 31, 2020. However, it could still qualify for a waiver under the new rule, which takes effect on April 1, 2020.

“Our understanding and according to press reports, under the new rule, states and territories will be granted a waiver only if the unemployment rate is both above 6 percent and 20 percent above the national average for two years before a state (including the VI) would qualify,” Ms. Plaskett said.

Citing the current USDA work requirement waiver, Ms. Plaskett said the V.I.'s aggregate unemployment rate for the requested area during the period of August 2017 through July 2019 was 9.2 percent. During the same time-frame, the national average unemployment rate was 3.9 percent.

“Therefore, even under the new rule, the VI will in all likelihood be able to keep its waiver,” Ms Plaskett said.

In letter earlier this month, Mr. Francis asked the Congresswoman for clarification on the rule changes and the potential impact on the territory.

“This rule change would most impact the segment of our population that is affected by the shifting job market,” Mr. Francis wrote.

Mr. Francis has asked Ms. Plaskett to share any steps taken by her office regarding the rule change, as well as any ways that the Legislature can support initiatives that protect local SNAP beneficiaries.