

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

Pat McCrory
Governor

Aldona Z. Wos, M.D.
Ambassador (Ret.)
Secretary DHHS

December 23, 2013

Mr. Donald Arnette
Regional Administrator
United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service
61 Forsyth Street, SW, Room 8T36
Atlanta, GA 30303

Attn: Ms. Kathy Tankersley, FNS State Systems

Re: North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology (NC FAST)
Response to NC FNS Advance Warning 12-11-13

Dear Mr. Arnette:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your letter of December 11, 2013. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) understands the urgency of this matter. Prior to receipt of your letter NC DHHS was already taking steps to address these concerns. We want to assure you that we will continue to implement corrective actions to resolve the concerns raised in your most recent letter. We trust these corrective actions demonstrate our commitment to ensure that we comply with statutory requirements. Please accept the following as our corrective action plan.

Application and Recertification Backlog

The state has taken several steps to ensure that applications and recertifications are processed timely:

- A letter dated December 20, 2013, *USDA DCDL Dec 2013.doc*, was sent to all 100 county DSS Directors with information to reinforce the requirements regarding timely and untimely applications and recertifications. This letter reemphasized instructions to the counties that all expedited FNS applications must be processed within 7 days and all regular FNS applications must be processed within 30 days if the case is ready to process. The letter also stressed requirements regarding timely processing of recertifications for ongoing benefits.
- NC DHHS has reallocated four statewide positions that will provide assistance to DSS Directors and their managers regarding effective utilization of their agency resources to achieve program performance standards. Two of the four positions have been filled effective February 1, 2014.
- Additional program representatives will join NC FAST effective February 2014, to provide onsite support and help counties develop business processes that will increase the productivity of caseworkers.

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- NC FAST provides a weekly pending application report and pending recertification report. Please see attachments *NC FAST Pending Applications 20131211.pdf*, and *NC FAST Pending Recertifications.pdf*. A review of the reports shows pending FNS applications submitted through ePASS that are currently active and receiving benefits, as well as identifying duplicates. Each ePASS application will be reviewed by FNS business staff during the next 30 days and a report will be provided to each county DSS agency with instructions to appropriately process the duplicate applications pursuant to policy. A data fix was put into production on December 14, 2013, that flags potential duplicate applications submitted on active household members.
- In September NC DHHS developed a SWAT team of state staff to provide support to assist those counties that were significantly behind in recertifications. The SWAT team has been trained to process FNS applications and recertifications. The FNS State Business Team will review all pending reports each week and determine if a county office needs assistance to process applications or recertifications. The teams will work together to identify counties who need assistance before a county has a backlog of cases to process and before households are late receiving benefits.

NC FAST Defects

- Please find in the attached document *Defects Opened Since 08162013 for USDA_Updated 12172013.xlsx*, the list of 73 defects identified subsequent to the USDA visit. To date 58 of these defects have been fully resolved. As to the 15 remaining defects, an approved workaround is in place. This list includes a description of the defect, the workaround (interim solution) in place and the date resolved or expected resolution date.
- Please find attached the *USDA Help Desk CAP and Status Report 12202013.pdf* document that provides the status, analysis and corrective action plans to address the Help Desk tickets per the USDA visit on August 15, 2013.

Local Access to NC FAST

- The NC FAST Team worked collaboratively with county staff and county IT staff to mitigate any concerns or issues related to moving staff to Google Chrome. The NC FAST Team also surveyed all 100 counties to analyze the current user experience with moving to Google Chrome. Many counties are using multiple browsers like Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Firefox and Opera. The use of multiple browsers in the work place is becoming more common as we found in our communications with our counties. Some primary reasons for this trend are that different browsers provide different advantages. For example, Firefox is unbeatable when it comes to flexibility and customization; Google Chrome is well regarded for its unmatched brute speed; Opera is known for innovating ideas; and Internet Explorer is most often the default browser that most users are accustomed to using. We found that most counties are providing their workers with multiple browser options to allow them to determine which browser they prefer to use for the tasks they are performing or the application they are accessing. The NC FAST Team continues to communicate with our counties during our biweekly County Champion calls to address any questions they may have related to this or other concerns. Through our continued communications with county staff and IT staff we have not heard that any additional training was required to move county staff to Google Chrome. This interim solution is still in place and has served counties well.
- The NC FAST team and IBM used diagnostic tools to identify the root cause and a resolution to the intermittent Internet Explorer (IE) issues. Our analysis determined that the Spring 2013 Microsoft security patch was the root cause.
- The NC FAST team and IBM are piloting the resolution and currently monitoring to ensure we have mitigated the issue. The pilot testing is scheduled to be completed the first week of January 2014. If the resolution is successful, the NC FAST team will then work with county technical staff to implement the appropriate Microsoft release patches to resolve the IE intermittent issues.

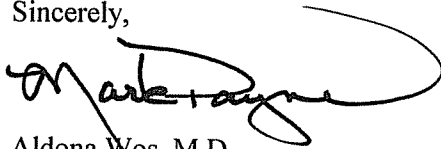
- The standard browsers officially supported by the IBM Cúram solution and NC FAST are Microsoft Internet Explorer 8, Microsoft Internet Explorer 9, Microsoft Internet Explorer 10, Google Chrome and Google Chrome Frame; however, IBM Cúram and NC FAST both use standard web technologies and formats that should be compatible with all browsers. We will continue to work with all counties and support the official standard browsers previously listed.

Information for the NC FAST Post-Implementation Review (PIR)

- FNS staff and NC DHHS staff met via conference call on December 13, 2013, and clarified questions related to the information that had been provided. Per that discussion, NC DHHS provided the following attachments to document these clarifications.
 - *0.2 NC_FollowUp FNS Questions-Responses_120613.docx*
 - *5.5 Help Desk Process Flows_P26.pdf*
 - *5.6_NCFast-Aging-Incident-Rpt_2013.06.28.pdf*
 - *7.2_Training-App-Scenario2_2013.12.13.pdf*
 - *7.3_Training-App-Activity_Pending_App_for_Required_Info_2013.12.13.pdf*
 - *7.4_ePASS-Electronic-Signature-Screenshot_2013.12.13.pdf*
 - *USDA_Follow-up_120613AWR_Report_for_NFPPRDA1_Snaps_29609-29610.mht*
 - *WAS_NMON_LPAR_trending_1125_1206_USDA.pdf*

NC DHHS management and the NC FAST team extend our appreciation to you and your staff for your continued guidance and leadership. This program is extremely important to the citizens of North Carolina. The corrective actions outlined in this letter are being monitored weekly at the highest level in order to assure that we stay on track for successful implementation. If you have questions, please contact Wayne Black, Division of Social Services Director, at (919) 527-6336.

Sincerely,



for Aldona Wos, M.D.
Secretary

- Enclosures (15):
- A1 *NC_FNS Advance Warning_VSB 12-11-13.pdf*
 - A2 *NC FAST.pdf*
 - A3 *NC FAST Pending Applications 20131211.pdf*
 - A4 *NC FAST Pending Recertifications 20131211.pdf*
 - A5 *USDA DCDL Dec 2013.doc*
 - A6 *Defects Opened Since 08162013 for USDA_Updated 12172013.xls*
 - A7 *USDA Help Desk CAP and Status Report 12202013.pdf*
 - A8 *0.2 NC_FollowUp FNS Questions-Responses_120613.docx*
 - A9 *5.5 Help Desk Process Flows_P26.pdf*
 - A10 *5.6_NCFast-Aging-Incident-Rpt_2013.06.28.pdf*
 - A11 *7.2_Training-App-Scenario2_2013.12.13.pdf*
 - A12 *7.3_Training-App-Activity_Pending_App_for_Required_Info_2013.12.13.pdf*
 - A13 *7.4_ePASS-Electronic-Signature-Screenshot_2013.12.13.pdf*
 - A14 *USDA_Follow-up_120613AWR_Report_for_NFPPRDA1_Snaps_29609-29610.mht*
 - A15 *WAS_NMON_LPAR_trending_1125_1206_USDA.pdf*

cc: Robert Noonan, Administration for Children and Families, Deputy Assistant Secretary
Joseph Cooper, NC DHHS, Chief Information Officer
Sherry Bradsher, NC DHHS, Deputy Secretary for Human Services
Rob Kindsvatter, NC DHHS Division of Child Development and Early Education, Director
Dennis Streets, NC DHHS Division of Aging and Adult Services, Director
Wayne Black, NC DHHS Division of Social Services, Director
Sandra Terrell, NC DHHS Division of Medical Assistance, Acting Director
Anthony Vellucci, NC DHHS, Office of NC FAST, Director
Angela Taylor, NC DHHS, Office of NC FAST, Deputy Director

NC FAST Doc ID: 13-0097