



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Food and
Nutrition
Service

Midwest Region

77 W. Jackson Blvd.
20th Floor
Chicago, IL
60604-3591

February 10, 2016

Nick Lyon, Director
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services
320 South Walnut Street-6th Floor
Lansing, Michigan 48913

Dear Mr. Lyon:

This is in response to your letter dated February 5, 2016, which requested that the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) increase the access and availability of lead testing to all Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) participants impacted by the Flint water crisis. In your letter, you request that FNS permit WIC funds to be used for lead testing costs for all WIC participants until September 30, 2017. I am writing to you to communicate USDA's approval of that request.

On January 16, 2016, President Obama signed an emergency declaration for Flint, Michigan due to water contamination. The water crisis has resulted in elevated lead levels which can have detrimental health effects, particularly for children under age six. FNS is committed to assisting the State of Michigan in addressing the water crisis, particularly as it impacts WIC participants. WIC is intended to serve as an adjunct to health care during critical times of growth and development. To that end, we have always encouraged and supported collaboration between the WIC Program and other State-administered programs in meeting the health needs of participants.

FNS has been advised that currently, there is a lack of resources in Flint to provide immediate lead testing for the WIC population. The nutritional risk created by the water contamination warrants an immediate programmatic response. Providing access to testing for lead levels helps ensure immediate actions can begin to help mitigate the impact of elevated lead levels for WIC's vulnerable population. Due to the extraordinary nature of this crisis, FNS will temporarily allow the costs of lead screening for WIC participants to be charged to the WIC Program through September 30, 2017, as requested. Further, FNS requires that any current cost sharing arrangements for lead testing of WIC participants continue so that costs are not unnecessarily shifted to the WIC Program. It is our understanding that while the costs of testing for some children in Flint under the age of five is already covered by Medicaid, the costs of testing approximately 1,600 infants and children under age five who are not covered by Medicaid and 2,250 women participants may be charged to WIC. Please confirm this understanding and provide this office with the estimated costs of providing lead testing to all WIC participants. We will review actual costs through our regular monitoring and oversight of the State and local agency.

Since September 2015, USDA has supported the residents of Flint and the State of Michigan in responding to this crisis in a variety of ways across our nutrition assistance

programs, including approving additional funding for fresh fruits and vegetables that deliver nutrients important in mitigating lead absorption and utilizing existing program flexibilities that allow WIC participants to use ready-to-feed infant formula, which does not need to be mixed with water. We look forward to continued collaboration in improving the health and nutrition of residents in Flint and throughout Michigan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim English". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Tim" and last name "English" clearly legible.

Tim English
Administrator